

# THE COMMONWEAL

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WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

### NOTES ON NEWS.

MR. O'BRIEN has got another four months, which no doubt is as little as could be expected "under the circumstances." But the circumstances are curious. A citizen is summoned before a court, and with his counsel has to fight his way *into* it; when in it, he finds that his judges are going practically to try him with closed doors, and being naturally indignant at this proceeding, takes the far more reasonable course of fighting his way *out* of it amidst the applause of everyone except the said judges. Here are strange proceedings against the respectability of a Court of law-and-order! Such things have been the immediate preface to open rebellion.

Robespierre in his time was accused of "demoralising" the guillotine by too indiscriminating use. Mr. Balfour, in his career of pasteboard-Tory-Robespierre, will have to beware of this trap of the demoralisation of punishment; or rather he has already fallen into it, and thereby won the sincere thanks of all Socialists; for, though it may be said that the Balfourian persecution in Ireland is but a game being played between two bodies of politicians, yet it must be remembered that the tortures of the prison-cell are a very palpable reality, and also that they have not been inflicted only on "gentlemen," who have duly counted the cost and accept it as part of the political game, but also on poor people who will receive but a very moderate amount of glory as a reward. The felon's punishment has been "demoralised" in Ireland, and bears with it no least shadow of disgrace, but honour rather; and the reflection of this demoralisation is spreading even to respectable England.

The *Star* and the *Pall Mall*, the two Radical prints of London, are at daggers drawn just now, and perhaps for the rest of their natural lives. This may well be thought a mere battle of the kites with the crows; though apart from the blind and obvious partyism of the *Star*, and the amusingly blatant jingoism of the *Pall Mall*, both papers have been of some service to us. But to a bystander the whole controversy anent the aldermen is a curious commentary on electioneering in general. "Fight hard," says the *Star*, "get in your Liberals while you can, you may not have another chance." "Fight soft," says the *Pall Mall*, "perhaps our opponents will remember our generosity when their turn comes, and fight soft also."

I must say that from a party point of view the *Star* seems to me to have the best of the argument; for if you go into the game, you must take the advantages of the game as they turn up, or lose them. On the other hand, that you should be obviously afraid to put up for re-election your men who have just won does not say much for the wisdom of the ballot-box. Our two contemporaries illustrate neatly the two quagmires in which politicians wade, and become so loathsome thereby. For the *Star*, reforms are means toward that great end the success of the Gladstonian Liberals, which by some unexplained magical process will at once both destroy poverty and sustain riches and make us all happy,—or if not, it isn't our business. For the *Pall Mall*, Radicalism is an enterprise for the discovery or manufacture of a moralized Toryism (under the name of democracy) whereby the British Empire, having reduced the rest of the world to starvation, shall reign supreme, with the ten Commandments of an exclusive ancient eastern tribe (glossed by modern hypocrisy) our rule of life, and a high court for the trial and punishment of anatory excesses;—or, indeed, is this also only another and less honest form of the great political maxim, "We in, you out, and the rest to the Devil"?

The *Daily News*, in an article on the O'Brien incident, says, "We disapprove of boycotting, whether it is practised by the Primrose or National League." O holy simplicity! Of the journal, too, which the other day was praising the proposal of the United States Congress for the wholesale boycotting of Socialists from the soil of America. But *Nulle fides cum hereticis servanda*—no faith need be kept with heretics.

We have had another anniversary lately; that of the fall of Khartoum and the death of the general of the Christian commercialists—Gordon, to wit. It is to be supposed that as long as it is convenient to remember him and his virtues we shall have them dinned into our ears. But whatever they may have been, or however amiable they may have made him to his friends, do not let us forget that he *was* the general of these pests of the world; and that he had to carry on war as war—that is to say by means of slaughter and destruction—and that slaughter and destruction carried on wholesale in a bad cause is murder of the worst kind: murder, the evil consequences of which are hard to foresee or measure. The Fall of Khartoum was a victory of the oppressed; and whatever Gordon might have been had he been fighting for the good of the world, as it was he fell not as a martyr to a great cause, but as an instrument of oppression whom fate at last thrust aside.

The acceptance of Boulanger's triumph as a victory for monarchism can only come of ignorance or impudence: of course the various openly reactionary factions would vote for their champion, but it is now notorious even to our middle-class press that their votes would never have returned the General; and that a great mass of Socialists have voted for him simply to be used as a stick wherewith to beat the opportunist dog, and the worse the man is the properer for that purpose, for the easier he will be to throw away when he is done with. That is their view, but undoubtedly it is a dangerous game to play; surely they had better have voted for Boulé, and thus have registered themselves definitely as revolutionists along with men like Vaillant. It is strange, too, that they should have forgotten the extra-ferocious part which Boulanger's regiment played amidst those who massacred the Commune.

W. M.

Comrade Hobart, who put up as a candidate in one of the divisions of St. Pancras, deserves our sympathy. The *Star* announces that he wasn't only defeated because he was advanced, but that he was "rather too much so." This means, I suppose, that he did not drop his principles sufficiently to please the respectable householders of St. Pancras. How this goes to confirm what William Morris has always said, "that for a Socialist to get elected, it is absolutely necessary that he should get in as something else." Comrade Hobart is to be commended for his honesty; but he may be advised to drop the electioneering business for the future. He is plainly not suited for it.

Our valued contemporary, the *Star*, went into ecstasies upon the attainment of its first year of existence. With the modesty so characteristic of its eminent editor, it spent two columns in singing its own praises. Among other good things too numerous to mention, it recounts that "Thanks to our efforts, the stupid ostracism of the Socialists has come to an end; and on their side, too, Socialist organisations have abandoned much of the wild talk, the viewy aims, the impracticable methods which they inherited from German sources."

It will be news to German Socialists to hear that they are noted for "their wild talk," etc. If Socialism had come from T. P.'s own beloved country it might be understood. But how do our State Socialists relish T. P.'s assertion that "He," by the seductive blarney of a countryman of O'Connell's, has converted them from "raving revolution" to the mild paths of constitutional agitation? We can imagine indignant denials from some of them; but let that pass.

What I want to deal with particularly is the "stupid ostracism" of the Socialists by, I presume, the respectable Liberal party. We ought, it seems, to be thankful to T. P. for providing us with an introduction to respectable society. But, unfortunately, the stupid ostracism has rather intensified on the part of the respectable press. Take the *Daily News*, for instance, which boycotts the very mention of any Socialist meeting, and its example is copied by one or two Radical journals I could name.

This was not so a few years back, when the *News* and these other papers looked upon Socialism as a mild form of lunacy, to be treated

with good-natured indulgence. Now it is so formidable that it is endangering the existence of the great Liberal party, and therefore it is ostracised as much as possible.

That Socialism is becoming popular among the workmen Radicals of London cannot be denied; but for that we haven't to thank the *Star*, but the events in Trafalgar Square. The shoe's on the other foot; the *Star* tolerates Socialism because its customers want it.

I have merely cited this passage from the *Star* article as an instance of the admirable cheek of a certain able editor. It forms a splendid example of the primary art of a commercial age, the art of self-advertisement. To those who desire to become proficient in this charming accomplishment, we may recommend them to study that two columns in the *Star*.

What T. P. has done for the State Socialist party is this—He and his party have served them like Disraeli served the Whigs, stolen their clothes and left them breathless and shivering. Result, every political humbug is masquerading on the County Council as a State Socialist, while the editor of the *Star* ejaculates, "Hooray! that's one of our candidates!"

D. N.

### THE MANCHESTER MARTYRS.

THOSE who have listened with quickened pulse to the spirited war-song "God Save Ireland" must often have wondered who were the "noble-hearted three," whose gallant death is so brilliantly celebrated in T. D. Sullivan's stirring verses. For those among us of the younger generation, and, perhaps, for some even of our elders, there is but a dim and misty recollection of an event which happened nearly twenty-four years ago. I can recall hearing much when a boy of the dreaded Fenians, whom I, in common with other middle-class lads, looked upon as a species of newly-discovered cannibal, noted for their savage ferocity; but this dread was mingled with a large amount of admiration; and when the news came of the gallant attack on the prison-van at Manchester, and later the account of how Allen, Larkin, and O'Brien boldly and calmly met their death upon the scaffold, then I, with many others, began to reverence such dauntless heroism. Election speeches and eloquent gasconade are all very well, but a brave deed under the banner of a cause which we are taught to loathe will dwell in our memories far longer than all the palaver of the mightiest orator that ever lived.

The memory of these events is well worth reviving at any time, and especially now, as only recently a very distinguished countryman of the gallant Fenians who were basely murdered by English law, has taken occasion to eulogise the murder of our Chicago comrades by the administrators of the capitalist-made laws of the United States of America, and so, by reflection, endorses the murder at Manchester. Let me tell briefly what led up to that legal murder at Manchester of the men who knew how to die for their country.

After the fiasco of '48, one or two of the refugees held still to the hope of an armed rising that should sweep alien rule out of Ireland. James Stephens and John O'Mahony studied in Paris all the methods of the more experienced Continental revolutionists, and, having done so, proceeded to put them in operation, Stephens at home and O'Mahony in America. In the south of Ireland Stephens found little subterranean fires were smouldering that afterwards broke out in the "Phoenix Society." 1858 saw the first little sputter; a few years more and there came the Civil War in the United States. Here the Irishmen saw, as they thought, a golden opportunity; not only was it a school of arms where in deadly earnest they could prepare to meet the English red coats, but at the time England was supposed to be so involved with the Southern States that the crushing of Secession would mean war with her. Into the Federal ranks poured the Irishmen in thousands; the Fenian societies spread like wildfire in Ireland and America. In 1863 the *Irish People* was founded in Dublin, and preached Fenian doctrines uncompromisingly; in September 1865 it was seized by the authorities and every Fenian arrested on whom they could lay hands. In May 1866 the Fenian invasion of Canada took place, when the grateful Republic repaid the Irishmen who had sustained it on their bayonets by betraying them to the British Government. Then it was resolved to beard the lion in his den. The whole story of the risings, the alarms, and the misfortunes of '67 is too long to tell here; our part of it begins on November 11, 1867, when before daybreak some "active and intelligent" constables noticed four broad-shouldered, muscular, but "suspicious-looking" men loitering about a clothes-dealer's shop in Manchester. Two were arrested after a desperate struggle, but two got away; those taken had tried very hard to get their hands into their coat pockets; and as they had loaded revolvers there, it is quite possible that the constables might have paid dearly for their interference. After several remands, the truth was discovered by accident, and the supposed burglars proved to be two famous Fenian leaders, Colonel Thos. J. Kelly and Captain Deasy. When first arrested they had given false names and the police could not find anything against them, but the magistrate kindly remanded them under the Vagrant Act, and on their being brought up again, and the intelligence of the police force of Manchester still not being up to time, a second remand was decreed by the Solon of the magisterial bench. The whole of this proceeding was clearly illegal, for they were certainly not vagrants in any sense of the word; but any stick will do to beat a dog with, and any law is good enough for a Fenian or a Socialist.

It was the afternoon of September 8th when the two prisoners Kelly and Deasy were placed in a police-cell, after their remand, to wait for the prison-van which was to convey them to the City Jail, Bellevue. About three o'clock the van was drawn up to the front of the police-court to remove all the prisoners, and among them the two Fenians. At this time the police noticed two men hanging about the court whom they suspected to be Fenians. They attempted to arrest them, but on the display of a revolver and bowie-knife by these dangerous persons, the police thought better of it, and allowed them to get off with very little difficulty. This appears to have caused some slight alarm among the police-court officials, and Kelly and Deasy were put in irons, and other precautions also were taken. Seven policemen accompanied the van, in addition to the driver and Sergeant Brett—three riding with the van and four in a cab following; Sergeant Brett was seated in the corridor inside the van. Besides the two Fenians, one woman and three or four boys were inside the van as prisoners. The van started; but it was not noticed by the sage police authorities that beside its guard of police it was preceded by several Fenians in a cab.

About midway between the city and the jail the van had to pass under a railway arch, which crosses the Hyde Road, adjacent to which are a number of clay-pits. There is a large hotel near the railway bridge, called the Railway Hotel, where a number of military-looking men were gathered. As the afternoon drew on, the number of these men increased, and at three o'clock more than fifty had collected. Amongst them was one taller than the rest; he was a fair-complexioned man, wore a black coat and cap, and seemed to be the leader. This man was afterwards identified as William Phillip Allen. At about four o'clock these men seemed to get restless and excited; they kept walking across the roadway in front of the hotel, and from the summit of a high bank of clay looked intently towards the city. At length Allen took up his position on the clay bank, and one by one, ten or twelve men gathered around him. The rumble of the prison-van was heard in the distance; Allen held up his hands, and from different points men glided towards him. The majority of these men were either mechanics or people evidently belonging to the middle-class; very few of them were poorly dressed.

When the van came in sight, Allen held up his hands, and two revolvers glittered in the light. His comrades followed his example. The few spectators of the scene noticed that they were all armed with new revolvers. The moment the van approached the arch, Allen stepped forward, and presenting a revolver at the driver, called on him to stop. He had scarcely spoken before a volley of pistol-shots were fired at the van. Then followed a wild scene; one of the horses was shot, and began plunging; the other, frightened, turned aside; and from that moment Allen and his friends were masters of the situation.

When the pistol-shots were fired the officers on the top of the van scrambled down as quickly as they could, and the driver was knocked off with a large stone. One of the leaders climbed up to the top of the van, and at a signal from him about twenty labourers, who had been hiding in a clay-pit, climbed up after him. The armed men formed a circle round the van and menaced all who approached with loaded revolvers. Those on the roof were supplied with huge stones, and battered at the roof, which was too strong for them. Allen then directed some labourers armed with hatchets and crow-bars to burst the door in. The constables, aided by some tavern loafers and a few other English slaves, eager to do a good turn for a policeman, with the snobbish servility of their class, attacked the brave Fenians; but a few revolver-shots quickly sent them to the rightabout. It was found impossible to force the door, and one of the party discharged a pistol through the lock. The policeman Brett, who refused to get out of the way, and applied his eye to the keyhole of the door at the critical moment, got a bullet through his head for his stupidity. His keys were taken from him, the doors unlocked, and the prisoners released. As Deasy was borne from the van, Allen clasped his hand and exclaimed, "I will die for you, Deasy!" He kept his word. Their object effected, the Fenians dispersed; but unhappily Allen and a few others were captured by the police and their toadies. Other persons to the number of twenty were afterwards captured in the general hunt for suspects that followed, and five men with eighteen others were placed on trial charged with the killing of Brett.

The Government appointed a special commission to sit at Manchester for the trial of the prisoners, and on the 27th of October Mr. Justice Blackburn and Mr. Justice Mellor arrived in that city, and the commission was opened on the next day.

D. J. NICOLL.

(To be continued.)

LONDON PAUPERISM.—The number of paupers in London, exclusive of lunatics in asylums and vagrants, on the last day of the second week in January, was 103,685, as compared with 104,618 on the corresponding day of last year, 101,114 in 1887, and 96,228 in 1886. The vagrants relieved on the same day numbered 1,090, of whom 943 were men, 132 women, and 15 children under 16 years of age.

THE UNEMPLOYED AND THE COUNTY COUNCIL.—The Social Democratic Federation have convened a meeting of the unemployed at Cleopatra's Needle, Thames Embankment, for Thursday, 31st, at two p.m. It is proposed to send a deputation from the meeting of the unemployed to the meeting of the new London County Council at Spring Gardens, to "call upon the member of that Council to use their utmost efforts, collectively and individually, to organise the labor of honest workers, who demand justice, not charity, on artisans' dwellings, embankment of the Thames, improvements of the streets, the erection of baths, washhouses, public halls, improved latrines—such as have been built in the city—and other useful public works."