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## NOTES ON NEWS.

THE usual game is being played with Mr. O'Brien in Clonmel Jail as to prison clothes and the like. I suppose, since he has begun in this fashion, and has once considered himself bound to protest against "degradation," he must go on with it. We have over and over again in these columns expressed the commonsense view that it is the inflictor, rather than the endurer of prison brutalities, who is "degraded" by them; and also that we do not see why there should be classes in prison any more than in the outside world. At the same time, no one can refuse admiration to O'Brien's staunchness; he accepts the rules of the game and is determined to play it out to the end, and if he sticks to it he must win.

Balfour and his mates are certainly piling it on. The sentences on Mr. Sheehy carry the matter on a step further; six months and four, not to run concurrently as I understand, is good measure according to modern views of political criminality. However, Mr. Sheehy and his friends must remember that worse things have been done within the last two years. In America they hang people outright for the same crime as Mr. Sheehy has committed, and the Balfourian revenge for which the Gladstonians very rightly consider so monstrous; and, indeed, we may say of Ireland. "If they do these things in the green tree, what shall they do in the dry?"

The suicide of the Crown Prince of Austria is tragic enough—granted. Granted also that the contrast between his position, so high above the many agonies of ordinary struggling people, and the pain that slew him is dramatic. But not less tragic, surely far more so, is many a death that has taken place in London within the last few months that has had but a few disregarded lines in a daily paper for its epic. Even a day or two ago a poor man was charged before some magistrate with jumping into the Thames—with the crime of being able to bear it no more, since there was no chance for him on any side. I thought the piteous reasons he gave for committing this crime could hardly have been stronger; I am sure his case demanded considerably more pity than that of the late Prince; and, besides the pity, abundance of shame on our part; and between the pity and the shame longer newspaper articles might have been written, perhaps with profit, that have been concocted concerning the late tragedy in high life.

Mr. Goschen, in addressing a big Tory gathering at Stratford, took upon himself the pleasing and easy task of taunting Mr. Morley and Mr. Gladstone for not having done anything towards bettering the condition of the workers in spite of their democratic pretensions. This is a fair taunt coming from a Socialist, and even coming from a Tory cannot be satisfactorily answered by a Liberal; but a Socialist can answer with a clear conscience. "Goschen, two wrongs don't make a right; you have done no more than the others, and you only plume yourself on doing no less because your principles bid you do less—which makes your boasts absurd. You can only get any credit for some little thing you may have been forced into doing, by putting your position in this way: 'I am the enemy of the human race, and yet I have actually done something for the good of the human race.' Goschen, with all your usurer's cleverness, you are a fool!"

By the way, what between Lord Wolseley on conscription, Mr. Goschen on the national defences, and Mr. Stanhope's promise of a rapidly approaching European war, it is pretty clear that we are going to have a pull at the guinea-tree next Session on behalf of the army and navy, and that some glorious jobs will be set on foot. Some of the papers, even the Jingo *Pall Mall*, seemed to think that Mr. Stanhope had been overdoing it. That's quite a mistake; this kind of mustard-plaster should always be laid on with a trowel, and the *Pall Mall* shows by its practice that it understands that well.

The Balfourian banquet at Dublin with its "great laughter," and "shouts of laughter" over a man in prison, may turn out rather more

serious than Mr. Balfour thinks: people are often more moved by the way in which a thing is done than by the thing itself; and I should think that there could be few stomachs strong enough outside the purely party camp to stand this last strong meat (or strong drink perhaps) of Mr. Balfour. As to the man himself what can be said? The refined Cambridge gentleman, the superior person, the representative of culture, turning out such an unmitigated snob! Truly one doesn't want to scratch a middle-class tyrant very deep to find the low ruffian in him.

And after all, this hero, who boasts himself as having courage enough for anything, has funked and bolted, and Mr. O'Brien has had his clothes given back to him. Once again we fail to see that O'Brien has escaped a "degradation"; but, on the other hand, it is pretty clear that Balfour has tumbled into one.

The *Star*, the manager of the London Council election on the Liberal side, has had a roughish shake; but is pretty much quit for the fright, since it has got its "Progressive" list in as Aldermen with the single exception of the Earl of Meath, once Lord Brabazon (who the devil voted for him?)

But when you have looked at the list you won't find very much in it to frighten a Tory. The one distinguished person in it is Mr. Frederick Harrison, he has at least the advantage of not being a politician; but he himself would indignantly repudiate the name of Radical or Democrat, and he has on many occasions attacked Socialism directly. But certainly he is the best man on the list.

I am afraid that the *Star* having got rid of its fear, and having triumphed in this matter of the Aldermen, will not take warning by the incidents of the too obvious tendency of its machine politicians to rat when convenient.

We wish the *Star* well in virtue of some really useful articles it has from time to time; like the notes on our prison system which we quoted lately; or its excellent article on the Boulanger affair, which will clear the mind of many persons of misunderstandings on that point. But we wish it so well that its "unprecedented success" does not make us specially happy. Rather we wish it could understand the advantages of being in a definite and even narrow majority; the honour, the pleasure, the freedom of that position. No longer then need we puff Lord Rosebery or even Sir J. Lubbock and Mr. Edis a little; no longer need we have with sinking hearts to put in a daily column of Jeames-ery for the benefit of the democracy, or dangle before the delighted eyes of the dwellers in very small houses in the suburbs visions of the laces and diamonds of Society—h'm, well!—ladies. No longer need we in the same breath curse Warren and bless Bonfield, or look upon O'Brien's cell with horror while we are mildly satisfied with Parsons' gallows. We might be free, though our circulation decreased.

A Radical as a Radical in these days, when Socialism has already been well preached, must be a half-informed and somewhat blundering person, but he need not be an opportunist, or a machine-politician: he may be honestly struggling towards the light, and may have a genuine indignation at the unmerited suffering of the poor, though he has not yet thoroughly learned what causes them and does not know a remedy for them. Such men we may quarrel with at times, but they are not enemies, and they mostly will become our comrades. Let the *Star* be the organ of these men, and it will find a real function to fulfil, and be the intermediary between honest democratic enquirers and those who have been happy enough to learn what the real current of events is. This will be better than collecting a kennel full of curs that they may turn round and snap at its heels on the first opportunity.

Meantime, the fact that a really popular paper must of necessity, in order to sell, be such a very "mixed lot," shows what a prodigious amount of work has to be done, even among those who are beginning to understand their degrading position of dependence on the rich—their masters.

W. M.