

# THE COMMONWEAL

## The Official Journal of the SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

[REGISTERED FOR TRANSMISSION ABROAD.]

VOL. 5.—No. 166.

SATURDAY, MARCH 16, 1889.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

### CELEBRATION OF THE PARIS COMMUNE.

THE Celebration of the Eighteenth Anniversary of the Paris Commune (convened by the Socialist League and the Social Democratic Federation) will be held on

SATURDAY EVENING, MARCH 16th, at Eight prompt,

AT THE

SOUTH PLACE INSTITUTE,

SOUTH PLACE, MOORGATE STREET, E.C.

The following speakers will address the meeting:—

WM. MORRIS, H. QUELCH, D. NICOLL, JOHN BURNS, FRANK KITZ, H. BURROWS, H. HALLIDAY SPARLING, A. S. HEADINGLEY, PETER KROPOTKINE, LE MOUSSU, and E. BERNSTEIN.

CHAIRMAN: H. M. HYNDMAN

The following is the resolution which will be moved at the meeting:

*"That this meeting hopefully recalls the establishment of the Commune of Paris, and expresses its sympathy with the French workers who heroically struggled to abolish class rule, and the cruel capitalist exploitation of man by man; and looks forward with confidence to the early emancipation of labour for which they strove, being determined to employ all means to achieve that end."*

*Selections of Music will be given during the Evening by Members and Friends of the Social Democratic Federation, and the Choir of the Socialist League will render the 'Marseillaise,' 'All for the Cause,' and 'When the Workers have their own again,' etc.*

Comrades and friends are earnestly requested to take in hand the collection of money for the defrayal of expenses, for which purpose collection sheets have been issued. Donations may be sent to

W. H. LEE (S.D.F.), or F. KITZ (S.L.),  
Organising Secretaries, 13, Farringdon Rd., E.C.

### NOTES ON NEWS.

THE London Liberal and Radical Union has played a kind of return-match to the meeting commented on by us last week. That respectable body is obviously somewhat shocked at M.P.'s being treated like common clay, and has proceeded to clap a plaster on their wounds, although not without a certain amount of protest from the other side, but of course Mr. Howell and Mr. Cremer took care that the due resolution should be passed. Mr. Howell thought it disgraceful for Radicals to attack the M.P.'s who had been doing their best for the right of public meeting. Dear me, Mr. Howell! if everybody did his best what a different world we should have! And as for these gentlemen, if they had done their half-best or their quarter-best, we should all have praised them as men quite up to the mark. But to speak plainly, what they did was—nothing: though it must be admitted that they rather regret it now.

Poor fellows! They had been investing largely in Irish "political bird-lime," and didn't see the point of making an experiment in English ditto at the time; besides, they thought that they had got their dicky-birds already, and need not catch them over again. Let us hope that

they were mistaken. The extreme Radicals may yet take a leaf out of the book of a man who is much praised now—Mr. Parnell, to wit. How did he convert Mr. Gladstone to Home Rule? By organising his followers to vote Tory. It is an old story now; but perhaps the Radicals remember it yet.

After all, probably Mr. Howell was joking: his solemn condemnation of Sunday meetings, which followed this, gives one that impression; and more particularly his professing to think that anyone present wanted him at any meeting except a due proper official Whig one; for the joker who cried out that he would have to go to Sunday meetings was quite obviously a joker.

The fact is, to Mr. Howell a meeting is not an assemblage of citizens, gathered together to give genuine expression to a sense of their grievances; or to educate themselves into understanding their haplessly servile condition and its only remedy: to him a meeting in the open air is a necessary though seldom-to-be-resorted-to piece of the machinery of the machine-politics of which he is a votary. Such a meeting as this does not need a Sunday or general holiday for its success; it is simply a matter of wire-pulling and money-spending, and the thing is done, whatever it may be worth; and that is not much, I fancy, even to its projectors. Meantime, do not forget, working-men, that this M.P. who so despises Sunday meetings is your special representative.

Mr. Matthews' humbug about the Square is exactly what we might have expected of him; but it is rather surprising that the *Star* should still talk the stale nonsense of trying the matter legally: surely all those poor fellows who were so shamefully treated by the police and other courts for *not* rioting have had enough of law. The law courts will take very good care to confirm the police and its generals in all they have done. As far as these matters are concerned, they are there for that purpose. When juries begin to refuse to follow the direction of the judge when persons accused of defending their rights are before them, that will be a sign that the well-to-do are beginning to sympathise with revolution—and when will that be?

Meantime, those Radicals who really take to heart this trampling down of what they conceive to be their rights, should turn themselves seriously to the duty of making the whole democratic party throughout the country, look at this affair of the Square from the same point of view that some (only some, I fear) of the London Radicals do. It is not and cannot be a mere London question, but concerns all strugglers for freedom throughout the length and breadth of the land.

W. M.

The *Glasgow Herald* is "wise" in its generation. It has awakened to the fact "that the labouring classes of this country are becoming fully conscious of their strength," and that their "strength" is something more than merely numerical. With that fact lying heavy on his mind, the editor is constrained to say something to protect the interests of his masters—the commercial classes—and through them his own, by advocating isolated co-operative production, whereby the commercial classes can pocket the employers' fleecings, and he assures the workers that in following the directions of Karl Marx, "labourers [are] on a false scent." The "strength" of the labourers is more than numerical, it is growing more "knowing," and the scent of commercial papers is beginning to stink in their nostrils.

The parasites of labour have hitherto been assured that British workmen would never listen to the "dangerous doctrines" promulgated by their continental comrades, but that is all changed now. The *Glasgow Herald* is forced to admit, "Our workmen are slowly but surely following the lead of their continental brethren. It is time for society at large to realise that by far the most important question that looms in the immediate future is that of labour—its position, its claims, its rewards, and its fallacies. We may shut our ears to the clamour that is already beginning to be heard at our doors. Those sounds, dreaded as they are by many, are becoming articulate, and it will not be easy to ignore the fact for long." This admission, coming from

whence it comes, is significant and hopeful to Socialists. Our opponents clearly recognise and admit that in our movement there is a "strength" which must be met by other means than those they have hitherto forged in their mental foundries.

But this editor, whose foundation rests on the workers' wrongs, is fain to poise as the friend of the workers. He says, "We fear, however, that the sufferers will have to be contented to wait until statesmen and philosophers have agreed upon a method by which the 'socialism of the chair' may be converted into a reasonable and practical scheme for the amelioration of the condition of the masses. The present attempt to force on action at the cost of all other legislation cannot but be received by society at large with resentment." Mr. Editor need have no fear that the sufferers will "be contented" under these conditions. They will not wait in their "strength", which is getting something more than "numerical", until "statesmen and philosophers have agreed upon a method," and these latter will not find it "easy to ignore the fact for long." The workers do not require to be told that anything which will improve their conditions will "be received by society at large with resentment." They have analysed and summed up society's "resentment," and they know its meaning and worth.

In advocating his method, this "philosopher" of the chair says: "The would-be co-operator need not wait for legislation to put his theories into practice. He can begin at once by exercising economy, not parsimony, in his daily life. Then when he has succeeded in accumulating a little store, he will be in a position to join with one other person, or many other persons, in producing useful commodities, the profit which shall be wholly his own or his partners'." This "philosopher" seems never to have heard of producers having nothing to divide, owing to it having been annexed by the dealer, and yet in the same sheet in which his philosophy appears we read, "The dividend of the Edinburgh Meat Market Company, whose business premises are in Fountainbridge, is announced as 40 per cent." Neither does he condescend to say how a labourer getting 13s. per week, with a house and family to provide for, can exercise "economy, not parsimony" in order to accumulate "a little store" to start business. How can a coalminer become a coalmaster? G. McL.

## SIR WILLIAM HARCOURT IN ECSTASY.

SIR WILLIAM HARCOURT appeared in dazzling rhetorical raiment at Derby a couple of weeks ago. There was an exaltation in his utterance as of one who stood beside the throne of the most high political virtue, and whose eyes beheld the glory of universal justice. One could almost hear the flapping of his wings! What had happened? What event of transcendental importance had occurred thus to stir the waters of Sir William's deepest and innermost emotion, and inflate his seraphic soul upon the empyrean of political ecstasy? Had some great national calamity been averted? Had some class wrong, hoary with centuries of crime, been abolished? Had some great and gladdening measure of freedom been achieved? Not so. The event that had transfigured Sir William was of a much loftier order—the "Parnell letters" had been proved forgeries!

In his ecstasy over the discomfiture of the *Times* and the wicked Tories, and in his jubilation at the prospects of the Liberal party—himself included—coming back to office and emoluments, Sir William exclaimed, "We live in remarkable times—times that will live in the pages of history!" What a lofty idea of the making of history Sir William has! The poor Invincibles believed that if they could succeed in "removing" Mr. Forster, Lord Spencer, and probably Mr. Gladstone, they would in a humble way be making history; but they were not, alas! statesmen; they had not the magnifying eye of the politician, else they might never have been hanged, poor fellows! Had they had a particle of the political prescience of Sir William Harcourt, they would not have purchased knives and dipped them in the blood of their foes, they would have purchased pens and tracing paper and forged a few letters sympathising with rebels and political crime.

Surely, friends, this exclamation of Sir William's exemplifies the utter shoddiness of the sentiments that inspire, and the ideas that guide, the political leaders of our time? What a nation of dupes their followers are! The people who can be induced to believe that the fiasco of determining the right or wrong of Home Rule by an inquisition upon the private correspondence of Mr. Parnell, is a subject that will form a staple part of the history of our time, must have about as silly a conception of the duty of future historians as they have of present day statesmen. That the Parnell Commission business may form a theme for future comedy writers is likely enough; but that anything resulting from its revelations will be treated as a heroic episode in the future histories—long or short—of our country, presupposes the notion that our posterity will be a race of gaping idiots.

We do live in remarkable times; but what is most remarkable in them, appears to be quite beyond the ken of Sir William Harcourt and his political crew. Political slanders and party intrigue, letter forging and newspaper lying, are no new features in the world's history—they have been vastly common events, indeed. The terrible economic war raging around us; a free and civilised industrial population living in abject poverty amid stupendous wealth created by their own hands; the growth of social revolt, and the impending fall of centuries of class privilege and oppression—these are remarkable and

manifest facts of our time, facts which will vitally determine the destinies of the race; and these, I venture to assert, and not the nine days' wonder of Parliamentary gossips, will be the episodes of our time that will live in the pages of history. In a few years Sir William Harcourt, the Parnell Commission, and all the incidents in the party sham-fights of our day, the record of which fills the columns of hundreds of newspapers, will be forgotten, and their influence on the evolution of human progress practically effaced; but the Social Revolution which has already begun in our midst, its causes, its incidents, the efforts of its disciples and martyrs, unheeded by politicians and unrecorded by the press, these will not be forgotten, but will assume a majestic importance as the years go on and their achievement is seen and felt in the transformation of civilised life.

Immediately after emitting the above exclamation, Sir William referred to his "distinguished friend Sir Charles Russell" as "a man who by the greatness of his ability and the strength of his sympathy for freedom would deserve to take a place in the noble profession to which he belongs with Erskine, as a man who is willing to do battle against fraud and injustice, and to vindicate the principles of truth and freedom." Great Jehosaphat! What hallelujah chorus is this? Who is this blessed Sir Charles Russell whom Saint William Harcourt thus doth magnify? What great and good deeds hath this lawyer politician done that that lawyer politician doth so jubilantly praise him? Let us see. Five years ago Sir Charles Russell spoke and voted on the side of pay and preferment against Irish freedom. Three years ago he was made Attorney-General under Mr. Gladstone, and spoke and voted with his leader on the side of pay and preferment for Irish freedom. He prosecuted, for pay and preferment, Burns, Champion, Hyndman, and Williams, when, despite his efforts, they were acquitted of "crime." He lately championed Mr. Cunninghame Graham and the people's right to hold meetings in Trafalgar Square—he was paid to do so, and his political credit depended upon it. He has recently defended Mr. Parnell with much ability—he is paid to do so, it is said at the rate of £50 to £100 a day. Noble and disinterested sympathy for truth and freedom this! How many lawyers and politicians are there, think you, who would not do battle, as earnestly at least, against "fraud and injustice" for a similar fee? Truly, if the advocacy of justice and liberty were universally rewarded as Sir Charles's has been, political sanctity would become an epidemic in our midst.

The trade of a lawyer Sir William Harcourt designates a "noble profession." We can estimate the value of the adjective "noble" in Sir William's mind by remembering, that the first principle of that profession is to undertake the defence of any man or any claim for which the best fee is offered, and that it is esteemed a duty in that profession to use every will and simulate every sympathy for the cause of your client, no matter how black or rotten it may be. For every lawyer on one side of a case there is a lawyer on the other, so that one at least of every two must be brazening lies and cloaking crime; and in turn they must all do so.

As for Erskine, wherein is his claim to apotheosis? He was probably as good a man as it is possible for a lawyer to be; he was also a brilliant "pleader." He pleaded mostly on the side of popular liberty it is true; but his subsequent elevation to the Lord Chancellorship shows that in doing "battle against fraud and injustice" he did not forsake the path of pay and preferment. In the early part of his career he defended the publication of Thomas Paine's 'Age of Reason'—he was paid to do so—while in after years he pleaded vigorously for its suppression and the imprisonment of its publisher, when paid as a Government hack. No, the profession of an advocate is as sordid and hypocritical as the system which makes it profitable and respectable. It is twin with the profession of politics; two pretty handmaids of freedom and justice they are!

And Sir William himself: what a bright and beautiful specimen of political sanctity! Like his "distinguished friend," he speaks and votes on the side of the party that promises him most office and most pay. How long is it since he and the *Times* were bosom friends? When his party was opposed to Home Rule he denounced Mr. Parnell and his followers malignantly and unscrupulously. He accused them of the blackest crimes, and threw them as recklessly into prison as Mr. Balfour now does. He sent police and marines to coerce the poor Skye crofters to pay blackmail to robber landlords. Together with his "distinguished friend" he prosecuted the Social Democrats for doing in London, what he commends Irish Nationalists for doing in Mitchelstown. Verily, they are two political saints worthy of red letters in the calendar of devout liberalism!

Poor Richard Pigott was a born politician; had he been wealthy he would also have been a successful one; he would have made an admirable ambassador or secretary of state. But he was poor, and his poverty maimed his talents, and left traces of honesty in his character which spoiled him. He has committed suicide. If all political sneaks and frauds were to go and do likewise, Mr. Gladstone would have some difficulty in filling his offices when he again comes into power.

J. BRUCE GLASIER.

The mill-workers of Dundee have resolved to agitate for a third advance of 5 per cent. on their wages, to take effect on the 15th of March.

The Durham miners are agitating for an advance of 20 per cent., and a mass meeting was held last Saturday, to decide on what steps should be taken to force it.

The Greenock shipyard smiths, who wanted a rise of 10 per cent., have been offered, and they have accepted, 7½ per cent. They resumed work on the 7th of March.