

# THE COMMONWEAL

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WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

### NOTES ON NEWS.

THE great excitement of these last days, to wit, Mr. Balfour's Land Bill, will not excite Socialists, nor need they trouble their heads about the matter. On the face of it, it is a bill for raising the value of landlord's rents; but its real aim is to try to make the long-talked-out Irish question last a little longer as a piece of occupation for our "representatives" in the House of Commons, which may delude the people into thinking that the said representatives are doing something. It is hoped, in fact, that the nearly used-up football will still hold wind enough to bear a little more kicking.

All honest men, whether they call themselves Socialists or not, will applaud the jury at the Leeds Assizes who had the courage of their opinions, and refused to hand over our comrade Bingham to the tender mercies of Justice Grantham, who was quite prepared to show the world that it is a dangerous thing for even a well-to-do man to have any aspirations towards better conditions of life than the present; dangerous, that is to say, if he expresses those aspirations openly; and if he keeps them to himself—well, it is an old saying of the philosophers, that there is no difference between that which is not, and that which is not visible.

It may be too much to hope that this verdict is the token of the beginning of a new epoch in jury-work, in which juries will give verdicts according to their consciences (and according to their oaths, too, if that matters) in spite of the judge's summing-up. But it is a significant fact that the verdict in this case was loudly applauded in Court by the general public.

It seems unlikely that the Crewe lads will be executed. But if they are not to be hanged, which, as Wilkes said, is the worst use to which you can put a man, why should they be treated to the second worst way of using a man, to wit, putting him in prison? To give a long term of imprisonment to these unfortunate young men would be a mere cruel piece of subservience to the letter of the law. Our friend, Mr. Grant Allen, acting on this view, has been circulating a petition to the Home Secretary asking for a free pardon or at least a short term of imprisonment. Surely all those people, from the judge upwards, who were so "touched" in Court the other day, will agree to this.

The Labour Conference at Berlin is over, and when all is said there is little wonder that the English press should be most patriotically proud of the fact that what has been done is little more than to generally recommend an imitation of England in the way of industrial legislation. Though they might very well remember that "he knew well that coals would burn that first invented fire-tongs," or, in other words, factory legislation came first in England because the factory-hell grew hot here sooner than elsewhere. And now, when the boasting is done about being ahead, they might begin to think of keeping so.

This from the Sydney *Bulletin* of February 22, looks as if religious philanthropists were the same everywhere:

"An ex-parson, some ex-black labour sympathisers, and the paid secretary of an employers' union, run what is left of the Brisbane 'London Dock Strike Fund.' Between them they have managed to keep £400 from going where it belongs, and, after every tuppenny-ha'penny local accident they try to bluff the crowd into giving the dockers' coin to some hospital ward or flooded-out village. These Bananaland pull-backs have been kicking themselves since the big strike at having let the milk of human kindness ooze out of a pore or two that wasn't quite choked with filthy lucre. Probably it is to prevent any more oozing that they are now wallowing in a class-meanness. The money belongs to the London dockers and should go to them."

George Harrison was released on Friday, after serving two years, three months, and a fortnight of the four years' imprisonment to which he was sentenced after Bloody Sunday. He has come out with an arm crippled by a policeman's kick, and a constitution nearly destroyed

through the ill-treatment to which he has been subjected. Here is the story in his own words:

"It seemed a long and weary time since that day in November, '87, when the police fell on us we came over Westminster Bridge—I walking along in procession with the Progressives and the Blackfriars Club men. Somebody dropped a gas-pipe, and one of the police swore it was I hit him with it; and another fellow, when they got on to him with the staves, took his pocket-knife out on 'em, and stabbed somebody—he came and confessed it to me, and fully exonerated me to the committee of my club, when I was out on bail before my conviction, but it was no use getting two into trouble, and I knew the police meant having me anyway, innocent or not; they had been watching for a chance all day. So I said nothing about him—they would only have put us both in. Why, a policeman brought up an oyster-knife, and swore he saw me drop it. You see, the police knew me as a speaker and lecturer, and they'd warned me about holding meetings, so they were down on me, and besides, I was a witness against them in Blackwell's case."

He was first taken to Pentonville for a fortnight, then to Wormwood Scrubbs for nine months, after which he went to Chatham, where he remained until Friday. He says:

"I was very well treated at the first two places, but at Chatham it was different. I was treated very roughly there. Four times I was punished by solitary confinement in a horrible cell, and on every one of those occasions the punishment was unjustly given. They charged me with refusing to work when I was not able to work through my ill-health, and they charged me with talking when I was not. I cannot describe the terrors of those cells. The smell in them is horrible, and they are so cold, while the light is altogether insufficient. Whenever I came out of them after confinement I felt like a drunken man on regaining a better atmosphere; but if the change made me reel, as it did once or twice, I only got a clump aside the head."

One of those who interviewed him comments upon the "moderation" and the "absence of bitterness" with which he spoke of his wrongs. Well! he has shown already by his conduct that his heart is stouter than his tongue is long; he is no caterwauling weakling. But whether he himself does any of it or no, there will be a good deal of bitter thinking and strong speaking for many a long day to come about his case, which is but that of thousands of those who are not content with tyranny, and which will not be forgotten until it is not only atoned for but made impossible of re-perpetration. S.

### NEWS FROM NOWHERE:

OR,

### AN EPOCH OF REST.

BEING SOME CHAPTERS FROM A UTOPIAN ROMANCE.

CHAP. X. (continued).—QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

I SAID: "We have heard about London and the manufacturing districts and the ordinary towns: how about the villages?"

Said Hammond: "You must know that toward the end of the nineteenth century the villages were almost destroyed, unless where they became mere adjuncts to the manufacturing districts, or formed a sort of minor manufacturing districts themselves. Houses were allowed to fall into decay and actual ruin; trees were cut down for the sake of the few shillings which the poor sticks would fetch; the building became inexpressibly mean and hideous. Labour was scarce; but wages fell nevertheless. All the small country arts of life which once added to the little pleasures of country people were lost. The country produce which passed through the hands of the husbandmen never got so far as their mouths. Incredible shabbiness and niggardly pinching reigned over the fields and acres which, in spite of the rude and careless husbandry of the times, were so kind and bountiful. Had you any inkling of all this?"

"I have heard that it was so," said I; "but what followed?"

"The change," said Hammond, "which in these matters took place very early in our epoch, was most strangely rapid. People flocked into the country villages, and, so to say, flung themselves upon the freed land like a wild beast upon his prey; and in a very little time

the villages of England were more populous than they had been since the fourteenth century, and were still growing fast. Of course, this invasion of the country was awkward to deal with, and would have created much misery, if the folk had still been under the bondage of class monopoly. But as it was, things soon righted themselves. People found out what they were fit for, and gave up attempting to push themselves into occupations in which they must needs fail. The town invaded the country; but the invaders, like the warlike invaders of early days, yielded to the influence of their surroundings, and became country people; and in their turn, as they became more numerous than the townsmen, influenced them also; so that the difference between town and country grew less and less; and it was indeed this world of the country vivified by the thought and briskness of town-bred folk which has produced that happy and leisurely but eager life of which you have had a first taste. Again I say, many blunders were made, but we have had time to set them right. Much was left for the men of my earlier life to deal with. The crude ideas of the first half of the twentieth century, when men were still oppressed by the fear of poverty, and did not look enough to the present pleasure of ordinary daily life, spoilt a great deal of what the commercial age had left us of external beauty: and I admit that it was but slowly that men recovered from the injuries that they inflicted on themselves even after they became free. But slowly as the recovery came, it *did* come; and the more you see of us, the clearer it will be to you that we are happy. That we live amidst beauty without any fear of becoming effeminate; that we have plenty to do, and on the whole enjoy doing it. What more can we ask of life?"

He paused, as if he were seeking for words with which to express his thought. Then he said:

"This is how we stand. England was once a country of clearings amongst the woods and wastes, with a few towns interspersed, which were fortresses for the feudal army, markets for the folk, gathering-places for the craftsmen. It then became a country of huge and foul workshops and fouler gambling-dens, surrounded by an ill-kept, poverty-stricken farm pillaged by the masters of the workshops. It is now a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt, with the necessary dwellings, sheds, and workshops scattered up and down the country, all trim and neat and pretty. For, indeed, we should be too much ashamed of ourselves if we allowed the making of goods, even on a large scale, to carry with it the appearance even of desolation and misery. Why, my friend, those housewives we were talking of just now would teach us better than that."

Said I: "This side of your change is certainly for the better. But though I shall soon see some of these villages, tell me in a word or two what they are like, just to prepare me."

"Perhaps," said he, "you have seen a tolerable picture of these villages as they were before the end of the nineteenth century. Such things exist."

"I have seen several of such pictures," said I.

"Well," said Hammond, "our villages are something like the best of such places, with the church or mote-house of the neighbours for their chief building. Only note that there are no tokens of poverty about them: no tumble-down picturesque; which, to tell you the truth, the artist usually availed himself of to veil his incapacity for drawing architecture. Such things do not please us, even when they indicate no misery. Like the mediævals, we like everything trim and clean, and orderly and bright; as people always do when they have any sense of architectural power; because then they know that they can have what they want, and they won't stand any nonsense from Nature in their dealings with her."

"Besides the villages, are there any scattered country houses?" said I.

"Yes, plenty," said Hammond; "in fact, except in the wastes and forests and amongst the sand-hills (like Hindhead in Surrey), it is not easy to be out of sight of a house; and where the houses are thinly scattered they run large, and are more like the old colleges than ordinary houses as they used to be. That is done for the sake of society, for a good many people can dwell in such houses, as the country dwellers are not necessarily husbandmen; though they almost all help in such work at times. The life that goes on in these big dwellings in the country is very pleasant, especially as some of the most studious men of our time live in them, and altogether there is a great variety of mind and mood to be found in them which brightens and quickens the society there."

"I am rather surprised," said I, "by all this, for it seems to me that after all the country must be tolerably populous."

"Certainly," said he; "the population is pretty much the same as it was at the end of the nineteenth century; we have spread it, that is all. Of course, also, we have helped to populate other countries—where we were wanted and were called for."

Said I: "One thing, it seems to me, does not go with your word of 'garden' for the country. You have spoken of wastes and forests, and I myself have seen the beginning of your Middlesex and Essex forest. Why do you keep such things in a garden? and isn't it very wasteful to do so?"

"My friend," he said, "we like these pieces of wild nature, and can afford them, so we have them; let alone that as to the forests, we need a great deal of timber and suppose that our sons and sons' sons will do the like. As to the land being a garden, I have heard that they used to have shrubberies and rockeries in gardens once; and though I might not like the artificial ones, I assure you that some of the natural rockeries of our garden are worth seeing. Go north this summer and look at the Cumberland and Westmoreland ones,—where,

by the way, you will see some sheep feeding, so they are not so wasteful as you think; not so wasteful as forcing grounds for fruit out of season, I think. Go and have a look at the sheep-walks high up the slopes between Ingleborough and Pen-y-gwent, and tell me if you think we *waste* the land there by not covering it with factories for making things that nobody wants, which was the chief business of the nineteenth century."

"I will try to go there," said I.

"It won't take much trying," said he.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

## NOTES FROM NOTTINGHAM.

THE pleasure-house of the rich, the prison of the poor—such is this manufacturing centre of ours. All the sensual delights that are to the bourgeoisie the only relief from the *ennui* which follows the cares of money-getting, are here in abundance; and down in the slums—Narrowmarsh, with its dingy lodging-houses and narrow courts; the Meadow Platts, with their gloomy streets of back-to-back houses—the poor are penned in grime, squalor, and density. Perhaps no manufacturing town has fairer skies and less of the inky blackness with which capitalism elsewhere defiles the heavens, but the struggle of the worker against the plunderer is as hopeless here as amid the smoke of London or Sheffield. In what are called "good times," a proportion of the twist hands earn what are regarded as high wages, but to them there soon comes the cycle of depression when they are either unemployed or only gain a few shillings a week, and all the while the less skilled workers, and, above all, the hundreds of young women, who are employed in the finishing, patterning, bleaching, and dyeing of the lace, work long hours for low wages.

The workers, one hears, are wasteful and extravagant, and if so, they follow only too well the example of their masters in pursuing the will-o'-the-wisp of gambling, which has stricken this fair city as the Black Death smote mediæval Europe. An ex-bricklayer, who left that honest calling to turn bookmaker, and with his gains in that nefarious pursuit amassed more by running a brewery, is not a high example to hold up for a town's guidance; and yet the parsons and the fuglemen of capitalism generally have given this venerated bricklayer high municipal honour, and his great wealth has enabled him by his "charity" to buy much momentary popularity with the unthinking. The "abstinence" in virtue of which the capitalist holds the worker in chains, is aptly illustrated by the little villas in which the *cocotte* enjoys a luxury that the honest working-woman is a stranger to. The Corporation, packed with friends of Ireland and of Home Rule, sends its police clothing to be made in sweater's shops, and has erected a University College which for jerry-building can beat any suburban villa; the School Board, which underpays its assistant teachers and builds its educational system on their bodies as it were; the Board of Guardians, full of publicans and small tradesmen, notoriously selected by judicious manipulation of the voting papers, who put skilled artisans when unemployed to stone-breaking, and build palatial offices and a snugly-cushioned board-room for their own accommodation—these are our rulers. The Liberal party, as a rule, hold the control of local administration, and any sort of sweater is swallowed by the wire-pullers provided he bears the regulation trade-mark.

Amid a population sweated, overworked, and depressed in bad times, and corrupted and demoralised in good, the progress of the Socialist propaganda is necessarily slow. At the hearing of an election petition a month ago it was proved that dozens of voters were bought for a shilling a-piece; and while our Socialist comrades have to struggle with apathy on the part of the workers, the basest slanders and the most unscrupulous wire-pulling have been exerted on behalf of the "classes." For eight years, however, the sacred flame of Socialism has been kept alight, and though discouraged at times some few workers have laboured at the cleansing of the Augean stables of profit-mongering rule. Local elections have been fought as a means of propaganda, and comrades Peacock, Proctor, and Whalley have again and again led the assault, which has again and again proved a forlorn hope. Every Sunday in the summer open-air meetings have been held, and of late the party have secured a convenient hall near the centre of the town for lectures, etc. Comrades Sparling, Carpenter, and others, have already visited us, and the unskilled labour movement found in this room an asylum and in comrade Proctor a mentor, when official trades unionism of the Broadhurst kidney (the prevailing species) looked askance at it.

Much has been done, but much remains, and we are looking forward to the coming visit of the Socialists of the Midlands on the last Sunday in June to give the movement here an impetus that it sadly needs. After a day's pleasure the comrades from surrounding towns propose to help us in holding a great demonstration in the Market Place, when "the blood-red banner that our masters fear to see" will be a sign to the observant that the chariot-wheels of Socialism are rolling on. Next time I write I propose to deal with some of our masters and their peculiarities.

P.

At a public meeting of women, held at Adelaide the last week in January, it was decided to form a Women's Trade Union.

Soft coal in the neighbourhood of Pittsfield is worth 2 cents a bushel, and in Kansas City 22 cents a bushel, while corn in Kansas City is worth 10 cents a bushel and 70 cents in Pennsylvania. Can the "middle-man" between the two consumers be much less than a highwayman?—*Boston Globe*.