

# THE COMMONWEAL

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### 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