

# THE COMMONWEAL

## The Official Journal of the SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

VOL. 6.—No. 213.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 1890.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

### NOTES ON NEWS.

THE *Daily News*, in giving a glowing account of the Gladstonian meeting, of which William O'Brien and John Morley were the bosses, says that it would be a great mistake to suppose that the country is tired of the Irish question; that this feeling of weariness does not exist outside the London clubs, etc. Perhaps a Tory would answer with the proverb, "He who excuses himself accuses himself." Why should the *Daily News* suppose that people are tired of the Irish question? To speak plainly there is no doubt that everybody that is not a professional politician is heartily tired of the Irish question as it has been presented to us. In other words, it has about served the business for which it was taken up by the politicians, i.e., a game over which people could get desperately angry so that they might forget the real matters of importance—matters of life and death that are crying out to us.

The Irish are beaten then? All this excitement has been for nothing? No, surely not. On the contrary the English democrat has made up his mind, and for him the Anglo-Irish tyranny is a thing of the past. I suspect also that the intelligent Tory (if there be such a thing) has made up his mind also, and is preparing for a climb down by means of the inevitable ladder of compromise.

The real point to be noticed in the lull on the subject of Home Rule is this, it has lost its relative importance because of the advance of opinion within these last years. It is no longer the Great Wrong to be righted by the Great Redresser of Wrongs, the Great Liberal Party under the leadership of the G.O.M. Many Radicals, I think, honestly believed in this once, and thought that they, the freemen, could set this nation of slaves free.

All that is gone indeed! How fast the "wide-roaring loom of time" goes! How the web is changing! The Irish peasant oppressed by his landlord is not the only figure that the English workman sees on whom to exercise his political heroism, for he sees himself also in pretty much the same condition as his Irish brother, and for him to give freedom to any one before he has got it for himself is beginning to seem to him a dull job. The Irish question is getting to be swallowed up in the one question of classes. As a political football it has been pretty much kicked to pieces. But the Irish working-man, under whatever name, need not trouble himself about that. That he could be freed from his exploiter while other workmen were groaning under theirs, was a mere delusion of his, and the only hope for his freedom lies in the awakening of his English brethren.

In commenting on the proceedings of the Society for the Preservation of Footpaths, the *Daily News* says of the stealers of footpaths: "Generally the attempt is made more from want of thought than from any desire to rob the public." H'm, well; I don't think landowners do these things in their sleep. I remember a country lawyer telling me that the chief part of his business came from his devising means for the shutting up of rights of way. I asked him what he thought of his career set beside that of Jack Sheppard, and he replied that he must live. He seemed rather hurt by my views on that question.

W. M.

The *Labour Elector* has, if trades-unionists are not the curs which they are sometimes said to be, finally broken with any large body of workmen whom it may hitherto had some claim to speak for. In its last number it repeated the offence of the week before, by again attacking Mr. Parke, who, being in prison, is unable to speak for himself. One thing which I note with pleasure is the withdrawal of John Burns and George Bateman from connection with the *Labour Elector*. This is what might have been looked for; the last accusation that could have been brought against either of these men was cowardice. What the reactionary sheet will do now, deprived of the only name which gained it recognition or support, remains to be seen.

John Burns's letter in the *Star* showed what he felt; in it he spoke

of another sent by him to the *Labour Elector*, to which, however, that estimable paper made no reference, treating other similar letters in the same way. If this were done to conceal the receipt of Burns's letter, it was certainly useless; for "after all," like Mrs. Wilfer's underpetticoat, "we know it's there!" S.

We have been told that even Homer nods sometimes; but one is forced to think that Huxley was not only nodding, but fast asleep, when he wrote his profoundly illogical article in the *Nineteenth Century*, in which he makes such game of Rousseauism, as he calls the latter-day demand for equality of opportunity, or what a Yankee would call "a square deal."

To some it will sound like heresy to suggest that Prof. Huxley has, to use Oliver Wendell Holmes's phrase, only a one-story intellect. "All fact-collectors who have no aim beyond their facts are one-story men. Two-story men compare, reason, generalise, using the labours of the fact-collectors as well as their own. Three-story men idealise, imagine, predict. . . Specialists are the coral-insects that build up a reef. . . I had rather be a voyager that visits all the reefs. . . I am a little afraid that science is breeding us down too fast into coral-insects."

Prof. Huxley's latest seems to be a very sad proof of the truth of the above estimate, and of the statement which Holmes makes in another place that logic is not everything: "You can hire logic, in the shape of a lawyer, to prove anything that you want to prove." The correctness of this has seldom been proved so completely as when Prof. Huxley, starting with the fact that a new born baby is the slave of its nurse, ends up by agreeing that "there is much to be said for the opinion that force, effectually and thoroughly used, so as to render further opposition hopeless, established an ownership which should be recognised as soon as possible."

Physical-force revolutionists have not for a long time been provided with an authoritative sanction more complete than this of Prof. Huxley. As an incitement, it is as frank as when the *Times* said "that Liberty is a serious game, to be played out, as the Greek told the Persian, with knives and hatchets, and not with drawled epigrams and soft petitions." It is also a warning for the force to be justified must be strong enough to render further opposition hopeless. War à l'outrance means war justifiable and justified. It is support to what has been urged before, that had the men who took off Charles I.'s head have taken off a few more, there would have been no anti-revolution, no Charles II. It very considerably extenuates the later period of the French Revolution and its so-called excesses.

Prof. Huxley's method of unreason has done one little service, in that it has brought out two very eloquent letters from Robert Buchanan, who in the *Daily Telegraph* has shown that the son of one of Robert Owen's Socialist missionaries has still some lively sympathy with the views so ably expounded on the platform and in the *Glasgow Sentinel* of forty odd years ago by the Robert Buchanan of that day.

"Great wits jump, and poets are always allowed some prophetic instinct," says Buchanan. "Men advance more surely by freedom than by restraint, necessary as certain restraints may be. Before the outbreak of the English Revolution, personal prerogative, the arbitrary will of one sincere political bigot, had strangled English liberty. Englishmen rose en masse, and liberty, in the political sense, was saved. Before the outbreak of the great French Revolution, Catholicism had almost destroyed the commerce of a great nation. The inevitable cataclysm came, with what terrible accompaniments we all know. At the present hour, at the very time when the free thought of England is at its brightest and best, when the scientific and historic method have disintegrated the whole mass of religious superstition, still another great upheaval is imminent, to the peril, perhaps to the destruction, of our whole social system. . . A colossal Hand, which some call the hand of destiny and others that of humanity, is putting out the lights of heaven one by one, like the candles after a feast."