NEWS FROM NOWHERE: OR, AN EPOCH OF REST.

BEING SOME CHAPTERS FROM A UTOPIAN ROMANCE.

CHAP. I.—DISCUSSION AND BED.

Up at the League, says a friend, there had been one night a brisk conversational discussion, as to what would happen on the Morrow of the Revolution, finally shading off into a vigorous statement by various friends of their views on the future of the fully-developed new society. Says our friend: Considering the subject, the discussion was good-tempered; for those present being used to public meetings and after-lecture debates, if they did not listen to each others' opinions (which could scarcely but notice, of course), at all events did not always attempt to speak altogether, as is the custom of people in ordinary polite society when conversing on a subject which interests them. For the rest, there were six persons present, and consequently six sections of the party were represented, for which reason talk was not strong but discussion; Anarchist opinions. One of the sections, says our friend, a man whom he knows very well indeed, sat almost silent at the beginning of the discussion, at last got drawn into it, and finished by roaring out very loud, and damning all the rest for fools; after which bellowed a period of noise and then a lull, during which the aforesaid section, having said good-night very amiably, took his way home by himself to a western suburb, using the means of travelling which civilization has forced upon us like a habit. As he sat in that vapour-bath of hurried and discontented humanity, a carriage of the underground railway, he, like others, used discontentedly, while in self-reproachful mood he turned over the many excellent and conclusive arguments which, though they lay in his fingers' end, he had forgotten in the just past discussion. But this frame of mind he was so used to, that it didn't last him long; after a brief discolor, caused by dignity with himself for having lost his temper (which he was also well used to), he found himself musing on the subject-matter of discussion, but still discontentedly unhappy. "If I could but see a day of it," he said to himself: "If I could but see it!"

As he formed the words, the train stopped at his station, five minutes' walk from his own house, which stood on the banks of the Thames, a little way above an ugly suspension bridge. He went out of the station, still discontented and unhappy, muttering "If I could but see it! If I could but see it!" but had not gone many steps towards the river before (says our friend who tells the story) all that discontent and trouble seemed to slip off him.

It was a beautiful night of early winter, the air just sharp enough to be refreshing after the hot room and the stinking railway carriage. The wind, which had lately turned a point or two north of west, had blown the sky clear of all cloud save a light fleck or two which went swiftly down the heavens. There was a young moon half-way up the sky, and as the homeward carriage sighted it, tangled in the branches of a tall old elm, he could scarce bring to his mind the shabby London suburb where he was, and he felt as if he were in a pleasant country place—pleasant indeed, than the deep county was as he had known it.

He came right down to the river-side, and lingered a little looking over the low wall to note the moonlit river, near upon high water, go swirling and glittering up to Chiswick Eyot: as for the ugly bridge below, he did not notice, or think of it, except when, for a moment (says our friend) it struck him that he missed the row of lights downstream. Then he turned to his house door and let himself in; and even as he shut the door, disappeared all reminiscence of that brilliant logic and foresight which had so illuminatingly the recent discussion; and of the discussion itself there remained no trace, save a vague hope, that was now become a pleasure, for days of peace and rest, and clean and smiling goodwill.

In this mood he tumbled into bed, and fell asleep after his wont, in two minutes' time; but (contrary to his wont) woke up again not long after in that curiously wake-awake condition which sometimes surprises even good sleepers; a condition under which we feel all our wits pretternaturally sharpened, while all the miserable muddles we have ever got into, all the disgraces and losses of our lives, will insist on thrusting themselves forward for the consideration of those sharpened wits.

In this state he lays (says our friend) till he had almost begun to enjoy it: till the tale of his stupidities amused him, and the entanglements before him, which he saw so clearly, began to shape themselves into an amusing story for him.

And he paddled away quietly as I peeped for my swim. As we went, I looked down on the water, and couldn't help saying—

"How clear the water is this morning!"

"Is it?" said he; "I didn't notice it. You know the flood-tide always throws up a bit."

"Hum," said I, "I have seen it pretty muddy even at half-ebb."

He said nothing in answer, but seemed rather astonished; and as he now lay just stemming the tide, and I had my clothes off, I jumped in without more ado. Of course when I had my head above water again I turned towards the tide, and my eyes naturally sought for the bridge, and so utterly astonished was I by what I saw, that I forgot to strike out, and went spluttering under water again, and when I came up made straight for the boat; for I felt that I must ask some questions of my waterman, so bewildering had been the half-sight I had seen from the face of the river with the water hardly out of my eyes; though I felt this time I was quit of the slumberous and dizzy feeling, and was wide-awake and clear-headed.

As I got in up the steps which he had lowered, and he held out his hand
to help me, we were drifting speedily up towards Chiswick; but now he caught up the sculls and brought her head round again, and said—

"A short swim, neighbour; but perhaps you find the water cold this morning, after your journey. Shall I put you ashore at once, or would you like to go down to Putney before breakfast?"

He spoke in a way so unlike what I should have expected from a Hamlet of the streets. I stared at him, as I answered, "Please to hold her a little; I want to look about me a bit."

"All right," he said; "'tis no less pretty in its way here than it is off Barn Elms; it's jolly everywhere this time of the morning. I'm glad you got up early; it's barely five o'clock."

If I was astonished with my sight of the river banks, I was no less astonished at my waterman, now that I had time to look at him and see him with my head and eyes clear.

He was a man I met often, with a peculiarly pleasant and friendly look about his eyes,—an expression which was quite new to me then, though I soon became familiar with it. For the rest, he was dark-haired and bearded, well grown, and obviously used to exercising his muscles, but with nothing rough or coarse about him, and clean as might be. His dress was not like any modern work—a-day clothes I had seen, but would have served well as a costume for a picture of fourteen century life: it was dark blue cloth, simple enough, but of fine web, and without a stain on it. He had a brown leather belt round his waist, and I noticed that his clasp was of damascened steel beautifully wrought. In short, he seemed to me to choose the chief manner and refined young gentleman, playing waterman for a spare, and I concluded that this was the case.

William Morris.

[To be continued.]

THE ARGENTINE REPUBLIC AND ENGLISH RADICAL REFORMERS.

(Continued from p. 5.)

Time rolled on, and the year 1874 brought with it a presidential election, and great was the excitement during the latter part of the preceding year, as the parties in favour of the two candidates, General Mitre and Doctor Alinsia, were both very strong, and lively times were expected. Alinsia, however, had the advantage of being supported by the Government of the Province of Buenos Ayres, if he was not actually governor at the time. I think he had lately retired in favour of Alinsia's son.

I cannot help recalling to mind the graceful satire of Goldsmith in his "Letters to a Citizen of the World," as I begin my task of describing a contested election in the free Argentine Republic in the year 1874. A man has no wish to tell how an election is carried on, but incidentally I was told by some equally candid believer in Republicanism and Universal Suffrage, just arrived in the town of Navarro, and preparing himself to enjoy the sight of a "free" people exercising its right of suffrage, in order to choose the chief magistrate who should "preside over its destinies," for the next six years.

Free! oh yes, the ballot box was there, guarded by the agents of law-and-order, the gallows and the guard of the Partido (district), even a man armed with a carbine that would not go off and a big cavalry sword that would, and that on the slightest occasion. An awkward squad, they were paraded in front of the church, and in the porch of the jail, and they were at the gates and behind which sat the scrutineers with their president. You see how the influence of religion was invoked, to give solemnity and safety to this solemn civic ceremony. And yet, strong, and obviously a man with whom it was observed that none came to deposit their votes in that sacred urn but those who were of one and the same political colour, and that the colour of the Mayor or Juez, and other authorities of the district, did it appear to me was not free for sure.

Why was this? Were they not free to come? Certainly they were, but certain little previous incidents had shown clearly that they were sure to have their threats cut if they voted the wrong way. They were a set of working men, from all the different countries, who is "free" to accept the employer's terms or reject them and starve?

On the days before the election, there had arrived in the town a man well known in the district and in all the country round for the number of murders he had committed. He was one of those unfortunate victims of the hateful frontier system I have just mentioned, and of the many other injustices inflicted on the poor Gauchos. One of those of whom I am only supposed were not more, who, tired of injustice, and being daring and powerful, and skillful in the use of the long fagcon or dagger they use, turned out at war with society in every part of the country. The time was the same with them, one of the favourite feats of such men as this Juan Moreira being to engage in battle with the whole police force of a district, six or seven at a time, in a few hours. The feats were not so difficult as may be imagined, for the Gaacho was always well armed, and well mounted, which was of more importance still, while the police were always badly mounted and armed, and with very little desire of engaging in a fight, and though they were strong, they were very strongly in sympathy. They were at that time also quite unused to firearms, so the well-mounted Gaacho cut them up in detail, charging them when he chose on the open Pampa, or prairie, for it must be remembered that the Province of Buenos Ayres is one great flat open plain.

This Juan Moreira was known to have killed several men and one officer of police in the very same district, or Partido of Navarro, and yet here we find him coming openly to the town and taking up his quarters in the house of the Mayor of the town. There were election times, and it had been the custom at all elections to make use of fighting men, no matter what their antecedents. It was in some such house that the Mayor, who was the government party, but, being under some obligations to the Mayor, who was in opposition, he had placed his sword or fagcon at his service, and it was joyfully accepted. He brought with him a number of men more or less of the same order, and all of them together came to the meeting of the government party, by killing three of the opposite party in the suburbs of the town, and one old man in the public square, quite near to the Juzgado or Town Hall. This man, though left for dead, was not so, but died a few days after under the severities of the inquiry. When this party did not succeed in taking him, however, for Moreira as soon as he saw the crowd rushing into the house whipped off his poncho, and in a twinkling put all the lights out, and in the darkness and confusion he escaped.

The government of the province, being a supporter of the opposite party, the Alinsitas, sent down a squad of city police (25 men) to take Moreira, and as soon as the carriage arrived in the town they were joined on their arrival by a large number of the Alinsia party, and learning that Moreira was quietly taking his glass at a small inn in company with two policemen of the town, they altogether marched up to the inn at about an o'clock one afternoon, and when he did not succeed in taking him, however, for Moreira as soon as he saw the crowd rushing into the house whipped off his poncho, and in a twinkling put all the lights out, and in the darkness and confusion he escaped. Not content with this he turned and fired on them as soon as he reached a vacant space where he felt sure of escape. He grieved wounded one of the party with a bullet that pierced his lungs, but had his lower jaw and half of a pistol bullet from a blunderbuss, which lodged in his face. He escaped, however, and two days afterwards I was requested by a member of the municipality to go and visit him at the house of the commander of the National Guardes, from where he had escaped, and when there received from the party a present of a huge cast of a jaw half of a pistol bullet. He was a handsome, powerfully-built man, and bore the necessary operation without a grimace. After all was over he thanked me with all the grace and politeness which distinguish the Argentine Guacho.

It would be impossible for me to describe the confusion of mind which possessed me during all these events, and on this occasion in particular. I looked upon this man as the time as a vulgar assassin, and deserving as such to be attended only in the jail, as I told the man who came to call me; but he was actually in the hands of the authorities of the town, who supported him, and in any case he was to remain in the jail until the end of the political campaign, and that conclusion was perhaps more than one, the same way during the elections,—and they do so still.

The upshot of the matter was that the opposition party took up arrears paid by their candidate General Mitre, declaring that he has been defrauded of their rights because the government party had done what the opposition had shown they were ready to do, where they had the power, as in Navarro. Then the government called out the National Guardes and the free Mitre party did all the same where they could.

Then was seen the spectacle of the poor Gauchos dragged from their homes to fight, either for or against the government, according to the political toings of their masters of the moment.

It was a strange and curious sight to see them mustering in Navarro. Every man came with his horse and equipments, and he was furnished with a long cane with one blade of scythe fastened to the end of it by way of a lance—that the people of Guacho.

(To be continued.)

William Lloyd Garrison, the great Abolitionist, has declared himself on the side of the Single-tax and Socialism. The National Guarani. — Another of those famous metropolitan paupers, exclusive of lunatics in asylums and vagrants, taken on the last day of the weeks named hereunder (enumerated inhabitants in 1901, 5,618,000) — 1903, 5,741,804. Third week of December, 1898—indoor, 59,339; outdoor, 41,345; total, 101,284. Third week of December, 1897—indoor, 59,418; outdoor, 41,345; total, 100,763. Third week of December, 1896—indoor, 57,078; outdoor, 40,814; total, 99,892. These figures do not include patients in the fever and smallpox hospitals of the Metropolitan Asylum district. The number of these patients on the last day of the week was returned as 1,774, in 673 in 1898, 2,993 in 1897, and 696 in 1896. Vagrants relieved in the metropolis on the first day of the week in December, 1898—Men, 725; women, 115; children under 16, 15; total, 852.