

THE COMMONWEAL

The Official Journal of the SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 1890.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

CHICAGO MURDERS & BLOODY SUNDAY.

"Let the voice of the people be heard."—Parsons.

Two Meetings to celebrate the Anniversary of above events will be held as follows—

ON TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 11th, at 8 p.m.

AT THE

MILTON HALL, HAWLEY CRESCENT,
KENTISH TOWN ROAD, N.W.

The following speakers will address the meeting:—Wm. Morris, F. Kitz, R. W. Burnie, J. Turner, Mrs. Lahr, Miss E. Lupton, Mrs. Schack, D. J. Nicoll, C. W. Mowbray, and Louise Michel.

Revolutionary Songs will be sung during the evening. Admission free.

ON THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13th, at 8 p.m.

AT THE

UNITED RADICAL CLUB, KAY STREET,
HACKNEY ROAD, E.

For full particulars see small bills. Admission free.

Funds are urgently needed for the carrying out of the above meetings. All donations will be gladly acknowledged in the *Commonweal* by
F. KITZ, Secretary of S.L.

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WORKHOUSE SOCIALISM.

"GENERAL" BOOTH no doubt does deserve his title; his conduct of the "Army" shows that he is a general of no mean order. But like other people, he has the "defects of his qualities" as the French phrase it, and a good general is not likely to be a good citizen; for it is the business of a general to sacrifice everything to immediate success, and I cannot help thinking that the Salvation General does not fall behind others of his kind in this respect.

Anyhow, his "great scheme" as it is called, seems on the face of it to be meant as a bait to catch those who are looking open-mouthed for something to happen in the way of the improvement of life in this world, the reduction of some of the misery of modern civilisation. Indeed, there are plenty of well-meaning people with money to spare willing to impart it to the setting on foot of a "well-considered scheme" for the easing of their consciences by means of the amelioration of the lot of the poor; especially if such a scheme seems likely to dull the discontent now so rapidly rising all round about us, and which we hope will one day put an end to philanthropy by abolishing poverty. A safe scheme for the regeneration of society is likely to

make rich people open their purses, and I think it is no injustice to the General to say that he knows this well enough. Otherwise he might have discovered any time these twelve years that before people can turn their attention to religion, or anything else than the satisfaction of their daily needs, "they must be helped out of their present social miseries."

Meantime, since Mr. Booth is being proclaimed a new Socialist, and a prophet at that in some quarters, it may be as well to look for a minute at his scheme and see what it is worth, bearing in mind that it is put forward confessedly as a sort of shoeing-horn for a peculiarly degrading form of a worn-out superstition, which sees in the struggling world of men with all its aspirations and every changing succession of deeds, little more than an appendage and plaything of an irresponsible master, who neither asks nor allows mankind to understand him or his arbitrary commands.

For such a scheme of the universe, this social scheme of Mr. Booth's for dealing with the world as it is, is perhaps good enough, but for anybody with manly hopes for finding himself one of a band of friends, with a God, if he has a God, who is also a friend, this scheme of reform is inexpressibly shabby and sordid.

Yet, in a way, we should thank him for the figure of speech under which he shows us the labour of modern civilisation; or, to speak more plainly, the men who labour. Says he: "The cab-horse has its charter of two points; work is found for it, with food and lodging sufficient to enable it to get through its daily task—that is the first; the second is that when it falls down, whether it be by its own fault, or by that of others, it is helped up again—all questions as to who was responsible for its fall being deferred until it is set upon its feet again!"

We have said something like this ourselves from time to time, only we were looking on this state of things as a condition to be struggled out of, while to General Booth it is an ideal which has to be attained to. We must needs thank the General for showing us so clearly that we have not yet reached the cab-horse stage of prosperity.

It is natural that General Booth from the standpoint of this cab-horse ideal should sneer at those who venture to hope that civilised men may one day become as happy as savages and somewhat more wealthy. Natural also that as a "practical man" he should declare himself unable to wait any longer than the time necessary for effecting the smallest and most miserable of improvements. This is an old story that we are quite used to by this time; for we have seen on the one hand useless palliatives and blind-alleys of political trickery gone in for with enthusiasm, and on the other foolish pieces of rashness elevated into principles to be adored through thick and thin, all on the ground that we "cannot wait"; when in good truth we *must* wait for all that is worth having till people's minds are sufficiently impressed by the coming change to allow us to take definite action.

As for the "practical man" in question, the General: his practical scheme does not come to much; on the whole, it comes to less than any evasion of the real question which has been before the public. Whatever in it is not sheer nonsense—"utilising the waste of London," and so forth—seems to be taken from Mr. Herbert Mills' workhouse colony plan, which itself was taken from the Dutch beggar-colonies scheme actually in operation.

In fact, this wonderful new scheme of Salvation Socialism will not save many bodies, whatever it may do for souls. It is a very low form of what may be called, for lack of a better name, Workhouse Socialism, which takes it for granted that the workers must be in the main paupers, and which casts about for devices at once to get them better rations and to lower the cost of keeping them to the capitalists. The professors of this kind of Socialism (save the mark!) can see only that part of the workers who have been so degraded by the vile system under which we live that they seem at least wholly unable to help themselves, and so are fit subjects to be trotted about and organised by those of the well-to-do who are afraid or ashamed of the huge mass of misery which they form. These gentlemen never take any count of whatever is self-reliant or thoughtful amongst the workers, believing them, perhaps, to be too respectable to be either unhappy or discontented—in short, dangerous to the stability of society. I think they are reckoning without their host, and that it is rather from the work-shops than the slums that the serious attack on "civilised society" will

come; though I admit it *may* come with sickening slowness. That is not so much our business as the making it sure, as we certainly shall.

Indeed, the real point of interest in General Booth's cab-horse Socialism is that he should have found it necessary to take up the miseries of the disinherited in order to keep his Army going and to advertise it. A few years ago such a move would not have been thought of. Now nothing is of any interest in politics, sociology, or religion which does not manage to pin itself to the subject of the impending change which is certainly coming on the world. The failure of civilisation is manifest to everyone who takes the trouble to think at all, to everyone who is not fossilised by party political warfare. That gain at least we have won, and it is no small one.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

ANARCHIST MORALITY.

Now and again, perhaps, it is well to turn aside for a while from the haps and chances of the daily conflict and get back to first principles—those first principles of which one is a little apt to lose sight in the strife of detail which necessarily occupies so much of our time. The new Ethic of Free Communism is (as it seems to me) a subject of which we may well think a little at such times. It would be a pity if we should unreflectingly make our adversaries a present of the contentment they are so fond of, that without god or master there can be no morality at all. In striving to show that a Free Ethic is quite conceivable and intelligible, I am conscious for my part that I am not putting forth any very original views, and I do not claim to answer difficulties save in somewhat sketchy fashion. I had at one time thought of translating for the *Commonweal* a very admirable series of articles on Anarchist Morality which have recently appeared in *La Révolte* (and to that series of articles I at once confess myself deeply indebted for much of what follows); but on reflection I have thought it best to give my own conclusions on the matter, for what they may be worth. Of course it is understood that nothing that is written here is put forth as a dogma, but only as the provisional opinion of one comrade addressing other comrades. There is no such thing as dogma among Free Communists, and, at best, our opinions on this question must be provisional, since we have, and can have, no experience of Anarchism in actual operation.

A terrible word in the ears of some, that word of Anarchism!—and a word to the use of which the Socialist League is of course in no way committed. Individually, I call myself an Anarchist, because I look forward to a state of society where there shall be no more coercion in any shape exercised by any human being or set of human beings upon any other human being or set of human beings, where there shall be neither laws nor government—government being replaced by voluntary organisation, law being replaced by order (two words which ought not to be linked together, since they are really opposed to each other). Whether we may pass at once into such a free society as this, or whether it be possible to dispense with all government while we are actually in the throes of the Social Revolution, need not be considered here.

Anarchism being defined, then, for the purposes of this discussion, as the absence of any kind of coercion, what do we mean by "morality"? As already intimated, it doubtless seems to some that to talk about "Anarchist Morality" is like talking about snakes in Iceland or freedom in the England of to-day. Let us dispassionately enquire if, in truth, this be so.

We may at once make a verbal concession to our opponents—a concession which will serve, perhaps, to put us upon the true track which our investigation should follow. Taking the word "morality" in its strictly etymological sense alone, there is no such thing as Anarchist morality.

In that sense, of course, the word merely means "that which is customary." It is an heirloom from the old times of primitive tribal communism, when that was good which was in accord with the custom of the tribe, and that was bad which was contrary to such custom. The custom had usually (perhaps invariably, if analysed) some reason of tribal advantage behind it. It might indeed be very hurtful to the individual in its operation, very injurious to other tribes; but that mattered nothing: tribe A. cared naught for tribe B., and no heed was taken by any tribe of individual as distinguished from tribal welfare. Hence, of course, there were as many systems of morality as there were tribes. Morality, in this old and original sense, may still be found among many savages at the present day. Indeed (although the old customs have perished and others taken their places, and the reasons for these others have often also vanished) large survivals of the ancient reverence for what is customary still continue even under modern civilisation. Hence the conventionalism from which we all suffer to-day. A convention is only a custom the reason for which has departed.

However, in the main, the breaking up of the old tribalism was followed by new theories of good and evil, new systems of right and wrong. Right was no longer (in theory, at least, and largely in practice) based on what was customary, but on considerations of a very different character. Still, we may note, the old word "morality" was used, just as we propose to use it in speaking of Anarchist right and Anarchist wrong. The result of the disappearance of the primitive communism of the tribe and of the coming in of private property was to make the lives of the vast majority of men and women very miserable and wretched. In this world there was no hope for them. They were not indeed perhaps quite so unhappy in their lot as they have

since become, as chattel-slavery has transformed itself into wage slavery; but they were quite unhappy enough to make them despair of ever attaining to content in this life. In a way that would be too long to trace here, a belief in another life hereafter had gradually evolved itself. What wonder that the workers in desperation began to lend ear to any who would bring them glad tidings of great joy of happiness for them after death, since in this present life they could not enjoy it? What if torments in that other life were reserved for their masters, for the "certain rich man" of the parable; Abraham's bosom and the delights of paradise for them? To such a gospel as this (I am dealing, of course, with the instance best known to us of a change which took place wherever "civilisation" conquered; in Asia as well as in Europe) the poorer people listened gladly—listened so eagerly and with such conviction that in the end, for a time at least, and helped by barbaric invasions and other causes, they carried their masters over with them to the new faith. The workers were wretched because for them there was nothing but work; the masters themselves even found this life somewhat barren, because they had left themselves without work at all and without aim or object for their days:—

"In his cool hall, with baggard eyes,
The Roman noble lay;
Then drove abroad, in furious guise,
Adown the Appian way;
He made a feast, drank deep and fast,
And crowned his head with flowers;—
No easier or no quicker passed
Th' impracticable hours."

This is by the way. We are only now tracing the moral story of the human beings alone worth considering, them of the proletariat. The new religion brought in the new morality. Since Heaven was reserved for the wretched, Hell for those who had their good things here, was it not clear that someone up in the sky objected to people enjoying themselves, on earth at least?—that he liked to see men miserable below? This seemed logical, at any rate. As, of course, good people went to Heaven, bad people to Hell, it must evidently be good and moral to be wretched, bad and immoral to be happy. Hence, while the old morality had been founded on tribal custom, the new morality was founded on asceticism—*i.e.*, the renunciation of natural pleasures here, in order to find supernatural pleasures by and by. Anything that attached us to this earth, where we had "no continuing city," was wicked. Of course, the very constitution of our bodies, our old friend "human nature" (which, as we know, is "desperately wicked") would not allow this theory to be fully acted upon in practice; but approximations were made to it. Cardinal Manning, General Booth, Mr. Stead, gospel-grinders of all shades, preach it to this day. Meanwhile the modern bourgeois has evolved a new form of morality for himself, which he calls Utilitarianism or "enlightened self-interest." This practically means that he is the good and moral man who succeeds by force or fraud in forcing himself to the front in the struggle of modern commercialism. I do not think this morality ever had any real hold on the workers, and therefore I pass it by here. It has been well dealt with by a comrade from whom most of us differ very widely, and who is not an Anarchist—I mean Belfort Bax, in his essay on the "Ethics of Socialism."

Now Anarchists, of course, reject all these theories of morality,—the old customary morality because the particular society to which it was applicable has gone, never to return; the religious morality because they know nothing of any life beyond the grave, and because they decline to be miserable at the behest of any real or fancied god or lord; the bourgeois morality because it involves the system of competition, which means, in the result, the system of bossdom, which is the negation of Anarchism. Moreover, Anarchists, I apprehend—believing (as they do believe) in the autonomy of the individual and his need for free self-development, unfettered by physical coercion or intellectual dictation from others—cannot accept any dogmatic system of morality saying to each, "Thou shalt not do this, or leave that undone," at all.

Does it follow, then (returning to our original question) that there is no such thing as Anarchist morality? Some calling themselves Anarchists have answered, "Yes, there is no such thing. Man is only an animal like the others. In every action of his life he is merely obeying a need of his nature. His needs, call them good or bad, he must satisfy. If it pleases him to die on a barricade for human solidarity, like a Parisian artisan, or on the scaffold for Anarchy, like our comrades in Chicago, he does it because it gives him pleasure to die for an idea—more pleasure than to live,—because he *must*. So, if he betrays his comrades to the police, he *only* does it because, given his constitution and his surroundings, he *must*. In either case, he only acts as circumstances force him, and it is absurd to apply terms of praise or blame to acts which he cannot help. Such acts are neither bad or good; they are indifferent."

R. W. BURNIE.

(To be concluded.)

LEEDS.—On Sunday we held two meetings with the assistance of comrade Pillier who came over from Dewsbury. Audiences and collections not so large as usual because of the severe coldness of the weather and the distressing rain which fell in the morning. In the afternoon many of our comrades attended the labour demonstration on Hunslet Moor and sold about 170 *Commonweal* and pamphlets, making a total of about 290 *Commonweal* and pamphlets for the week. We are vigorously pushing forward our arrangements for the commemoration meeting of the Chicago Martyrs. The Oriol Hall, Cookside Street, has been taken, posters and handbills are being printed, and we are expecting a party of comrades from Sheffield to aid us in making it a thorough success. We are expecting a crowded meeting. The speakers will be Hall, Charles, Bingham, Sweeny, Cores, and Samuels.—G. C.