

# THE COMMONWEAL

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WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

### 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 be expected of them), 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, four of which had strong but divergent 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, but at last got drawn into it, and finished by roaring out very loud, and damning all the rest for fools; after which befel a period of noise and then a lull, during which the aforesaid section, having said good-night very amicably, took his way home by himself to a western suburb, using the means of travelling which civilisation 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, stewed 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, and after a brief discomfort, caused by disgust 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 and unhappily. "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 flock or two which went swiftly down the heavens. There was a young moon halfway up the sky, and as the homefarer caught sight of 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—pleasanter, indeed, than the deep country 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 Eyott: as for the ugly bridge below, he did not notice it 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 to, disappeared all remembrance of that brilliant logic and foresight which had so illuminated 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 cleanness 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 curious, wide-awake condition which sometimes

surprises even good sleepers; a condition under which we feel all our wits preternaturally 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 lay (says our friend) till he had almost began 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.

He heard one o'clock strike, then two and then three; after which he fell asleep again. Our friend says that from that sleep he awoke once more, and afterwards went through such surprising adventures that he thinks that they should be told to our comrades of the League, and therefore proposes to tell them now. But, says he, I think it would be better if I told them in the first person, as if it were myself who had gone through them; which, indeed, will be the easier and more natural to me, since I understand the feelings and desires of the comrade I am telling of better than anyone else in the world does.

CHAP. II.—A MORNING BATH.

WELL, I awoke, and found that I had kicked my bedclothes off; and no wonder, for it was hot and the sun shined brightly. I jumped up and washed and hurried on my clothes, but in a hazy and half-awake condition, as if I had slept for a long, long while, and could not shake off the weight of slumber. In fact, I rather took it for granted that I was at home in my own room than saw that it was so.

When I was dressed, I felt the place so hot that I made haste to get out of the room and out of the house; and my first feeling was a delicious relief caused by the fresh air and pleasant breeze; my second, as I began to gather my wits together, mere measureless wonder: for it was winter when I went to bed the last night, and now, by witness of the river-side trees, it was summer, a beautiful bright morning seemingly of early June. However, there was still the Thames sparkling under the sun, and near high water, as last night I had seen it gleaming under the moon.

I had by no means shaken off the feeling of oppression, and wherever I might have been should scarce have been quite conscious of the place; so it was no wonder that I felt rather puzzled in despite of the familiar face of the Thames. Withal I felt dizzy and queer; and remembering that people often got a boat and had a swim in mid stream, I thought I would do no less. It seems very early, quoth I to myself, but I dare say I shall find someone at Biffen's to take me. However, I didn't get as far as Biffen's, or even turn to my left thitherward, because just then I began to see that there was a landing-stage right before me in front of my house: in fact, on the place where my next-door neighbour had rigged one up, though somehow it didn't look like it either. Down I went on to it, and sure enough among the empty boats moored to it lay a man on his soles in a solid-looking tub of a boat clearly meant for bathers. He nodded to me, and bade me good-morning as if he expected me, so I jumped in without any words, and he paddled away quietly as I peeled 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 thickens it a bit."

"H'm," 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 by this time I was quit of the slumbrous 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 went 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 Hammersmith waterman, that 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; "it's no less pretty in its way here than it is off Barn Elms; it's jolly everywhere this time in the morning. I'm glad you got up early; it's barely five o'clock yet."

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 handsome young fellow, 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 berry-brown of skin, well-knit and strong, 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 very well as a costume for a picture of fourteenth century life: it was of 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 its clasp was of damascened steel beautifully wrought. In short, he seemed to me like some specially manly and refined young gentleman, playing waterman for a spree, and I concluded that this was the case.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

## THE ARGENTINE REPUBLIC AND ENGLISH RADICAL REFORMERS.

(Continued from p. 8.)

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 Alsina, were both very strong, and lively times were expected. Alsina, 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 one of his political friends.

I cannot help recalling to mind the graceful satire of Goldsmith in his "Letters from a Citizen of the World," as I begin my task of describing a contested election in the free Argentine Republic in the year of grace 1874. I cannot but imagine the candid Chinaman, or 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 gallant policemen of the Partido (district), every 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 that temple was placed the table on which rested the aforesaid box, and behind which sat the scrutineers with their president. You see how even the influence of religion was invoked, to give solemnity and safety to this solemn civic ceremony. And yet, O shade of Whang Hoam! 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!

Why was this? Were they not free to come? Certainly they were, but certain little previous incidents had shown them clearly that they were sure to have their throats cut if they voted the wrong way. They were much in the predicament of the free worker in certain other countries, who is "free" to accept the employer's terms or reject them and starve!

A few 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 Gaucho. One of those, of whom I am only surprised there were not more, who, tired of injustice, and being daring and powerful, and skilful in the use of the long *facon* or dagger they use, turned out at war with society in every district. The rural police of that time were not able to cope 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 men, and rout them after killing one or two. The feat was not so difficult as may be imagined, for the Gaucho 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 to risk their lives in an attempt to capture a man with whom they were strongly in sympathy. They were at that time also quite unused to fire-arms, so the well-mounted Gaucho 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! So it was; but then these were election times, and it had been the custom at all elections to make use of good fighting men, no matter what their antecedents. The fact was, that Moreira had been sent for by the chief of the government party, but, being under some obligations to the Mayor, who was in opposition, he had placed his sword or *facon* at his service, and it was joyfully accepted. He brought with him a number of men more or less of the same stamp as himself, and they began operations by killing three men 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 my care. When Moreira and one of his men who accompanied him on this occasion, had retired, the police came and carried in the body to the Juzgado, and one of the policemen finding the sheath of Moreira's *facon* on the side walk, ran after him and restored it to him!

After this the opposite party hid themselves in terror, and the Mayor's party had it all their own way. Three cheers for Universal Suffrage and "free" institutions generally! A few days after this I saw Moreira and some of his companions galloping at full speed round the Plaza, or principal square, and shouting with all the force of their lungs, "Death to the Alsinistas!" I had occasion to see him more closely a little later on.

The government of the province, being a supporter of the opposite party, the Alsinistas, sent down a squad of city police (25 men) to take Moreira, and they arrived one night quite unexpectedly. They were joined on their arrival by a large number of the Alsina 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 there at about eleven o'clock at night, and surprised him. They 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 out all the lights, and in the darkness and confusion managed to slip out through them all! 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 grievously wounded one of the party with a bullet that smashed his lower jaw, but he himself was hit by a split 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 National Guards. I there removed from under the skin of the lower 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 Gaucho or peasant.

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 at 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 entitled to have his wounds attended to. I therefore came to the conclusion that it was my duty to attend him, as my refusal to do so could do no good in any way.

Such cases as these show plainly what law and authority really are, and how false is the pretence that they are intended to protect the weak, or serve the general good of the community. While the opposition party made use of Moreira and others, the government party released from the jails all such men as they thought they could rely on to serve them in the same way during the elections,—and they do so still.

The upshot of the matter was that the opposition party took up arms, headed by their candidate General Mitre, declaring that they had 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 Guards, and the Mitre party did 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 leanings of their masters.

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 shears fastened to the end of it by way of a lance—that was all.

JOHN CRAGGE.

(To be concluded.)

William Lloyd Garrison, the great Abolitionist, has declared himself on the side of the Single-tax and Socialism.

METROPOLITAN PAUPERISM.—Census of metropolitan paupers, exclusive of lunatics in asylums and vagrants, taken on the last day of the weeks named hereunder (enumerated inhabitants in 1881, 3,815,000).—Third week of December, 1889—indoor, 80,228; outdoor, 38,186; total, 98,414. Third week of December, 1888—indoor, 69,939; outdoor, 41,345; total, 101,284. Third week of December, 1887—indoor, 59,612; outdoor, 44,356; total, 103,968. Third week of December, 1886—indoor, 57,578; outdoor, 40,814; total, 98,392. 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 1889, 873 in 1888, 2,593 in 1887, and 686 in 1886. Vagrants relieved in the metropolis on the last day of the third week in December, 1889:—Men, 722; women, 115; children under 16, 15; total, 852.