

THE COMMONWEALTH

The Official Journal of the SOCIALIST LEAGUE.

VOL. 6.—No. 211.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 25, 1890.

WEEKLY; ONE PENNY.

NOTES ON NEWS.

"They ordain the unjust to minister justice, and do injury to them that be just." Judges are, like policemen, the paid upholders of things as they are, eager to avenge any onslaught upon property or privilege. So that when Mr. Ernest Parke, editor of the *North London Press*, came before Mr. "Justice" Hawkins and was found "guilty" of libelling a lord, everybody knew that his punishment was not going to be a light one. For it is to be remembered that Mr. Parke was sub-editor of the *Star*, and honoured in that capacity with the fear and hatred of the class whom their servant Hawkins was defending. Whatever quarrel we may have had with the *Star*, or with Mr. Parke himself, for occasional unfairness to Socialism and Socialists, we can have nothing but praise for their part in forcing something more than mere politics upon public attention.

If Mr. Parke had been connected with any other paper than the *Star*—outside of declared Socialist journals—he would have been let off with a quarter of the penalty to which he has been condemned. This was the universal opinion among press-men when they heard the verdict. And that if he had been a Socialist writer the penalty would have been doubled several times over I am equally confident. I do not yet know what his colleagues of the *Star* intend to do in the matter, but I hope that they are going to do something, and that they will allow the Radicals and Socialists of London to help them in doing it.

In the early days of the League, a then comrade raised a laugh upon one occasion by declaring that "his mission in life was to smash the British Empire." He has since become an "extinct volcano," as a contributor to "a contemporary" signs himself, and has apparently neglected his mission for a long time past. But there are innumerable signs that although he is not likely to carry out his threat of smashing the British Empire, the British Empire is fully capable of smashing itself, and further, that it will perform the desirable operation at no very distant date.

Despite the smooth prophecies of the Imperial Federationists, and the loud shouting of the Jingo mob, there can be no doubt in the mind of anybody who watches at all closely the course of Australian affairs that the birth of the Australian Republic is drawing very near; so near that men are counting the possibilities of repression, and preparing for their Bunker Hill. As Chief Justice Lillie, of New South Wales, said the other day:

"In truth, Australian Independence is in the air and in the hearts of men, and although no man can foretell the hour of its birth, its advent sooner or later is sure."

It will be many a long year yet before Australia will satisfy a Socialist by its administration of public affairs; a republic with private property, it will be like France or the United States; but all the same, there will be few Socialists who will not rejoice when the—well! when the republican flag replaces the Union Jack.

Rather different will be the case of the South African Republic, which is also trembling on the verge of actuality; for, in that case the rebellion will be in defence of the right of "whacking their own nigger." Brutal as is the British treatment of all subject races, including their own working-classes, there is yet some restraint imposed by the English Government upon the cruelty of the Africans towards the poor devils of natives whom they exploit. English or Dutch, Gentile or Jew, whatever the blood may be that runs in the exploiter's veins, it makes no perceptible difference in his attitude towards the "nigger." The white folk of South Africa are nearly as degraded in that respect as those of the Southern States of the Union are now, and would soon be as bad as those were before the war without any very great trouble.

After Australia and South Africa have departed—I don't know much about New Zealand—we may begin to expect the absorption of

the West Indies by the United States. Canada, too, is not far off throwing in her lot with the States—and where will the Empire be then, poor thing? where will the Empire be then?

A Mr. Sidney J. Thomson wrote as follows to the *Pall Mall Gazette* the other day:

"Some weeks ago you published an article on the Aired Bread Company, and mentioned that the average wage of the waitresses is 9s. a-week. I, as a holder of a few shares in the company, could not at first believe this statement; but subsequent inquiries confirm its truth. It seems to me monstrously unjust that a company earning a dividend equal to 25 per cent. should be satisfied to pay its servants so poorly. It must never be forgotten that every shareholder is himself an employer, and as such is, to the extent of his holding, responsible for the wages paid."

It is evident that he is not far from "finding salvation," and if he can only get his fellow shareholders to agree with him will have done some good in his day and generation.

Amid all the froth and splutter about Mr. Parnell as a co-respondent, there has been one utterance on the subject which was characterised by anything like sense; and that was the letter of our old friend and foe, Mr. Auberon Herbert, which appeared in the *Pall Mall* the other night, and which we reprint elsewhere. But then Mr. Herbert is honest and fearless, while all others who have written or spoken on the subject, being politicians, are also "formalists, out of fear and base flattery . . . a rout of temporisers, ready to embrace and maintain all that is, or shall be proposed, in hope of preferment."

S.

NEWS FROM NOWHERE:

OR,

AN EPOCH OF REST.

BEING SOME CHAPTERS FROM A UTOPIAN ROMANCE.

CHAP. III.—THE GUEST HOUSE AND BREAKFAST THEREIN.

I LINGERED a little behind the others to have a stare at this house, which, as I have told you, stood on the site of my old dwelling.

It was a longish building with its gable ends turned away from the road, and long traceried windows coming rather low down set in the wall that faced us. It was very handsomely built of red brick with a lead roof; and high up above the windows there ran a frieze of figure-subjects in baked clay, very well executed, and designed with a force and directness which I had never noticed in modern work before. The subjects I recognised at once, and indeed was very particularly familiar with them.

However, all this I took in in a minute; for we were presently within doors, and standing in a hall with a floor of marble mosaic and an open timber roof. There were no windows on the side opposite to the river, but arches below leading into chambers, one of which showed a glimpse of a garden beyond, and above them a long space of wall gaily painted (in fresco, I thought) with similar subjects to those of the frieze outside: everything about the place was handsome and generously solid as to material; and though it was not very large (somewhat smaller than Crosby Hall perhaps), one felt in it that exhilarating sense of space and freedom which satisfactory architecture always gives to an unanxious man who is in the habit of using his eyes.

In this pleasant place, which of course I knew to be the hall of the Guest House, three young women were fitting to and fro. As they were the first of the sex I had seen on this eventful morning, I naturally looked at them very attentively, and found them at least as good as the gardens, the architecture, and the male men. As to their dress, which of course I took note of, I should say that they were decently veiled with drapery and not bundled up with millinery; that they were clothed like women, not upholstered like arm-chairs, as most women of our time are. In short, their dress was somewhat between that of the ancient classical costume and the simpler forms of the fourteenth

century garments, though it was clearly not an imitation of either: the materials were light and gay to suit the season. As to the women themselves, it was pleasant indeed to see them; they were so kind and happy in expression of face; so shapely and well-knit of body, and thoughtful, healthy-looking and strong. All were at least comely, and one of them very handsome and regular of feature. They came up to us at once merrily and without the least affectation of shyness, and all these hands with me as if I were a friend newly come back from a long journey: though I could not help noticing that they looked askance at my garments; for I had on my clothes of last night, and at the best was never a dressy person.

A word or two from Robert the weaver, and they bustled about on our behalf, and presently came and took us by the hands and led us to a table in the pleasantest corner of the hall, where our breakfast was spread for us; and, as we sat down, one of them hurried out by the chambers aforesaid, and came back again in a little while with a great bunch of roses, very different in size and quality to what Hammersmith had been wont to grow, but very like the produce of an old country garden. She hurried back thence into the buttery, and came back once more with a delicately made glass, into which she put the flowers and set in the midst of our table. One of the others, who had run off also, then came back with a big cabbage-leaf filled with strawberries, some of them barely ripe, and said as she set them on the table, "There, now; I thought of that before I got up this morning; but looking at the stranger here getting into your boat, Dick, put it out of my head; so that I was not before all the blackbirds: however, there are a few about as good as you will get them anywhere in Hammersmith this morning."

Robert patted her on the head in a friendly manner; and we fell to on our breakfast, which was simple enough but most delicately cooked, and set on the table with much daintiness. The bread was particularly good, and was of several different kinds, from the big, rather close, dark-coloured, sweet-tasting farmhouse loaf, which was most to my liking, to the thin pipe-stems of wheaten crust, such as I have eaten in Turin.

As I was putting the first mouthfuls into my mouth, my eye caught a carved and gilded inscription on the panelling, behind what we should have called the High Table in an Oxford college hall, and a familiar name in it forced me to read it through. Thus it ran:

"Guests and neighbours, on the site of this Guest-hall once stood the lecture-room of the Hammersmith Branch of the Socialist League. Drink a glass to the memory! May 1862."

It is difficult to tell you how I felt as I read these words, and I suppose my face showed how much I was moved, for both my friends looked curiously at me, and there was silence between us for a little while.

Presently the weaver, who was scarcely so well-mannered a man as the ferryman, said to me rather awkwardly:

"Guest, we don't know what to call you: is there any indiscretion in asking you your name?"

"Well," said I, "I have some doubts about it myself; so suppose you call me Guest, which is a family name, you know, and add William to it if you please."

Dick nodded kindly to me; but a shade of anxiousness passed over the weaver's face, and he said—

"I hope you don't mind my asking, but would you tell me where you come from? I am curious about such things for good reasons, literary reasons."

Dick was clearly kicking him underneath the table; but he was not much abashed, and awaited my answer somewhat eagerly. As for me, I was just going to blurt out "Hammersmith," when I thought me what an entanglement of cross purposes that would lead us into; so I took time to invent a lie with circumstance, guarded by a little truth, and said—

"You see, I have been such a long time away from Europe that things seem strange to me now; but I was born and bred on the edge of Epping Forest—Walthamstow and Woodford, to wit."

"A pretty place, too," broke in Dick; "a very jolly place, now that the trees have had time to grow again since the great clearing of houses in 1855."

Quoth the irrepressible weaver: "Dear neighbour, since you knew the Forest some time ago, could you tell me what truth there is in the rumour that in the nineteenth century the trees were all pollards?"

This was catching me on my archeological natural-history side, and I fell into the trap without any thought of where and when I was; so I began on it, while one of the girls who had been scattering little twigs of lavender and other sweet-smelling herbs about the floor, came near to listen, and stood behind me with her hand on my shoulder, in which she held some of the plants that I used to call balm: its strong sweet smell brought back to my mind my very early days in the kitchen-garden at Woodford, and the large blue-plums which grew on the wall beyond the sweet-herb patch,—a connection of memories which all boys will see at once.

I started off: "When I was a boy, and for long after, except for a piece about Queen Elizabeth's Lodge, and for the part about High Beech, the Forest was almost wholly made up of pollard hornbeams mixed with holly thickets. But when the Corporation of London took it over about twenty-five years ago, the topping and lopping, which was a part of the old commoners' rights, came to an end, and the trees were let to grow. But I have not seen the place now for many years, except once when we Leaguers went a-pleasuring to High Beech. I was very much shocked then to see how it was built over and altered

and the other day we heard that the philistines were going to landscape-garden it. But what you were saying about the building being stopped and the trees growing is only too good news;—only you know."

At that point I suddenly remembered Dick's date, and stopped short rather confused. The eager weaver didn't notice my confusion, but said hastily, as if he were almost aware of his breach of good manners, "But, I say, how old are you?"

Dick and the pretty girl both burst out laughing, as if Robert's conduct were excusable on the grounds of eccentricity; and Dick said amidst his laughter:

"Hold hard, Bob; this questioning of guests won't do. Why, much learning is spoiling you. You remind me of the radical cobblers in the silly old novels, who, according to the authors, were prepared to trample down all good manners in the pursuit of utilitarian knowledge. The fact is, I begin to think that you have so muddled your head with mathematics, and with grubbing into those idiotic old books about political economy (he he!), that you scarcely know how to behave. Really, it is about time for you to take to some open-air work, so that you may clear away the cobwebs from your brain."

The weaver only laughed good-humouredly; and the girl went up to him and patted his cheek and said laughingly, "Poor fellow! he was born so."

As for me, I was a little puzzled, but I laughed also, partly for company's sake, and partly with pleasure at their unanxious happiness and good temper; and before Robert could make the excuse to me which he was getting ready, I said:

"But neighbours" (I had caught up that word), "I don't in the least mind answering questions, when I can do so: ask me as many as you please; it's fun for me. I will tell you all about Epping Forest when I was a boy, if you please; and as to my age, I'm not a fine lady, you know, so why shouldn't I tell you? I'm hard on fifty-six."

In spite of the recent lecture on good manners, the weaver could not help giving a long "whew" of astonishment, and the others were so amused by his *naïveté* that the merriment flitted all over their faces, though for courtesy's sake they forbore actual laughter; while I looked from one to the other in a puzzled manner, and at last said:

"Tell me, please, what is amiss: you know I want to learn from you. And please laugh; only tell me."

Well, they *did* laugh, and I joined them again, for the above-stated reasons. But at last the pretty woman said coaxingly—

"Well, well, he is rude, poor fellow! but you see I may as well tell you what he is thinking about: he means that you look rather old for your age. But surely there need be no wonder in that, since you have been travelling; and clearly from all you have been saying, in unsocial countries. It has often been said, and no doubt truly, that one ages very quickly if one lives amongst unhappy people. Also they say that southern England is a good place for keeping good looks." She blushed and said: "How old am I, do you think?"

"Well," quoth I, "I have always been told that a woman is as old as she looks, so without offence or flattery, I should say you were twenty."

She laughed merrily, and said, "I am well served out for fishing for compliments, since I have to tell you the truth, to wit, that I am forty-two."

I stared at her, and drew musical laughter from her again; but I might well stare, for there was not a careful line on her face; her skin was as smooth as ivory, her cheeks full and round, her lips as red as the roses she had brought in; her beautiful arms, which she had bared for her work, firm and well-knit from shoulder to wrist. She blushed a little under my gaze, though it was clear that she had taken me for a man of eighty; so to pass it off, I said—

"Well, you see, the old saw is proved right again, and I ought not to have let you tempt me into asking you a rude question."

She laughed again, and said: "Well, lads, old and young, I must get to my work now. We shall be rather busy here presently; and I want to clear it off soon, for I began to read a pretty old book yesterday, and I want to get on with it this morning: so good-bye for the present."

She waved a hand to us, and stepped lightly down the hall, taking (as Scott says) at least part of the sun from our table as she went.

When she was gone, Dick said: "Now, guest; won't you ask a question or two of our friend here? It is only fair that you should have your turn."

"I shall be very glad to answer them," said the weaver.

"If I ask you any questions, sir," said I, "they will not be very severe; but since I hear that you are a weaver, I should like to ask you something about that craft, as I am—or was—interested in it."

"Oh," said he, "I shall not be of much use to you there, I'm afraid. I only do the most mechanical kind of weaving, and am in fact but a poor craftsman, unlike Dick here. Then besides the weaving, I do a little with machine printing and composing, though I am little use at the finer kinds of printing; and moreover machine printing is beginning to die out, along with the waning of the plague of book-making; so I have had to turn to other things that I have a taste for, and have taken to mathematics; and also I am writing a sort of antiquarian book about the peaceable and private history, so to say, of the end of the nineteenth century,—more for the sake of giving a picture of the country before the fighting began than for anything else. That was why I asked you those questions about Epping Forest. You have rather puzzled me, I confess, though your information was so interesting. But if you and I have some more talk together, when our friend Dick isn't here, I know he thinks me rather a grinder, and besides the fun of being very busy with my hands: that's