

Notes [May, 1888]

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This is the day of small things. Let us be glad that an audience of London workmen decline to listen to a lecture from the chief commissioner of police, even when that pious bully proposes, with the aid of dissolving views, to discourse on Palestine at an entertainment "for the benefit of the working classes." The row at the Oxford, and even the "conversation" in Trafalgar Square, are symptoms of a certain amount of vital energy in a handful of Londoners; and anything is better than lying prone in the dust for tyrants to trample us. If we raise our little finger it is at least a sign of life, and who can say when the whole body may follow.

It seems as though the Boulanger craze would die a natural death, despite all the stock-jobbers of the 11 bakery " (as 11 boulanger " means baker in French, so boulangerie " is the street name for the followers and backers of the big, big B "). The hero of French Revenge has obtained but a few hundred votes in Haute Savoie, a department of peasant proprietors of ancient Bonapartist leanings, and he has been defeated in the manufacturing district of Isere. Both losses are significant. Of the, 170,000 votes in the Nord, announced with such a flourish of trumpets, 130,000 were those of Bonapartists and Royalists, who were obviously trotting out the general as a stalking horse for their own pet schemes of reaction. His other supporters were peasants who remembered the cheap purchase of communal lands under the last Empire, and workmen, sick of the middle-class Republic and the farce of representative government, who looked on Boulanger and his revision of the Constitution as a bandy battering-ram to upset things as they are. An insane venture with an ambitious intriguer who avowedly sets Napoleon the Little before him as a model! But despair ties a close bandage over the eyes of hungry men.

Happily the noisy general, with all his ambition and hypocrisy, seems about as wise as the famous owl that sat all night in a tree and cried "Tuwhit, tuwhoot, tuwhee." He has been making overtures to all sections of revolutionists, but Nature in his negotiations has apparently denied him the ready wit of the ordinary Frenchman. A few days ago the Possibilists (Workman's Party) sent a worker much respected in his quarter, a Communard of '71, to interview the new savior of society. The delegate inquired how it happened that this zealous friend of the people had taken part in shooting down Paris workmen after the Commune. " Oh, " replied Boulanger, " I shot no Frenchmen. I only fired at the foreigners " ! After this it is to be hoped that even the authority-loving Banquists will give up this Versailles hero as a revolutionary agent. Our

Communist-Anarchist comrades and the French Socialists generally regard him with as much contempt and detestation as they do the middle-class Republic itself.

To make himself completely ridiculous the would-be dictator is about to imitate Louis Napoleon's example to the letter and dabble in popular literature. From the preface to his *War of 1870*, just published, it appears likely that Boulanger's ill-wishers cannot do better than echo the malicious exclamation, "Oh that mine enemy would write a book." Copies of the work are to be distributed by the million!

The Rumanian peasants, like those of Russia and the Scotch Highlands, are suffering from insufficiency of land. They were emancipated from serfdom in 1864, three years after the Russian *Moujiks* and, as in Russia, the "freed" villages were allotted too scanty a portion of arable land to allow each family a holding large enough to support its members; whilst the redemption taxes were fixed at a rate out of all proportion to the value of the produce each family could raise. After twenty-four years of meek submission as law-abiding citizens to the exactions of government and of the large landholders, the peasants have at last been reduced to such straits that they have taken matters into their own hands. Result of a week or two of open revolt: A wholesale distribution of maize to relieve their starvation, and a promise of double-sized holdings and a reduction of dues. How soon would even this have been obtained by Parliamentary agitation?

A correspondent of *La Revolt* remarks that in the present state of tension in European politics, the Rumanian peasant insurrection is a seriously significant omen. The revolutionary activities of 1830 and 1848 were both heralded by an outbreak in the Danubian provinces.

The late Matthew Arnold was no friend to Socialism. He figured as the apostle of the intellectual development of property monopolists, as a man who, when the children of the poor cry for bread, would offer them a handbook of classical literature. Nevertheless, his mind was far too keen to permit him to be really ignorant of the fierce elements of Social Revolution fermenting beneath the careless world of "Culture" and "Philistinism." Those who heard his speech at the unveiling in 1884 of the fresco outside Mr. Barnett's church at Whitechapel (the fresco is copied from Watt's painting of "Time, Death, and Judgment") will never forget the vibrating tones in which Arnold pronounced the judgment of time against "the prince of this world, which is the perpetual ideal of selfishly possessing and enjoying." "One world and another has gone to pieces because it was fashioned to the inspiration of this ideal, and that is a consoling and edifying thought. Above all, it is a consoling and edifying thought for those classes which-in comparison with the great possessing and trading classes' which may be described as the fortunate classes-may be called the sacrificed classes." "Will the change come soon; will the renovation be in our own time? There are seasons, and this in which we live is perhaps one of them, when the crackings which we hear, and the swayings and the rockings which we see, and the signs and warnings on every side seem to say that the change cannot be very far off."

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