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Notes [Apr, 1891]

Freedom Press (London)

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THE LONDON ANARCHISTS CELEBRATE EASTER.

There is a good old custom, far older than the introduction of Christianity of celebrating the spring tide of the year by public assemblies and friendly gatherings, an ancient usage still of much practical importance, for it secures the hard-driven workers of to-day a moment's breathing space for rest and enjoyment. Two London Anarchist Groups resolved this year to utilize the opportunity. The Knights of Liberty, an East End Group of workers, initiated the idea of a Conference on Easter Sunday, to which all Anarchist Groups, English and foreign should be invited. The Freedom Group arranged, a social gathering for Easter Eve. Unfortunately times have been so extra bad lately that in many country groups there was no one able to afford a trip to London, the too scanty common funds of the groups being entirely eaten up by the necessities of local propagandist work: circumstances which gave 'a sort of monopoly value to comrades who managed to come tip from Norwich and Leicester, and another proof, if one were needed, of the unfree condition of the wage-slaves of "free" England.

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THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL ANARCHIST CONGRESS

A well attended meeting of Anarchists, including members of London and Provincial English groups, Germans, Italians, and Frenchmen, was HELD on Easter Sunday at the Autonomie Club. The question of what should be the action of English Anarchists on the First of May was discussed at considerable length. The opinion was generally expressed that Anarchists all over the country ought not to miss the opportunity of making good Anarchist propaganda on the First as well as on the Third of May, but should hold public meetings in common with their fellow workers on the Continent, and explain to the people the real meaning of the May Demonstration. It was agreed that a leaflet setting forth the Anarchist position on the subject should be got out for distribution, and 16s. was collected towards the expenses of producing the same. It was also agreed to send a message of greeting and solidarity to the congress to be held at Milan on the 12th of April.

OUR SOCIAL EVENING.-More than a hundred comrades assembled on the evening of March 28th in the tipper chamber of a City coffee tavern, to enjoy the pleasure of each other's society, to renew old friendships and form new ones, to gain inspiration, in an interchange of opinion and in comradeship, for the work lying before us. A glance round the large room, with its pleasant little tea tables, each brightened by the music of friendly talk, showed Germans and Frenchmen from the Autonomie in conversation with Englishmen from the provinces, Jewish Comrades from Berner Street, laughing and talking with members of the Italian group, the Editor of the Herald of Anarchy in amicable discussion with one of the Freedom staff, friends from Hammersmith Socialist Society, the London Socialist League, the Individualist Anarchist League, all cordially mingling with Anarchist Communists from every group in London. William Morris, from his Sick room, sent a pencil note, regretting his enforced absence. R. Burnie, the new editor of the Commonwealth, was also

him very strong meat. The neat, incisive sentences are like so many skillful sword-thrusts. Most of them are dealt for the liberty of Art, but, to Mr. Wilde, Art is inseparable from life. He strikes, too, at the cramps of Law and authority, which hinder our social progress, and at that still more terrible fetter of the soul, "Public Opinion." The only objectionable feature in the essay is the attempt to read into the teachings of Christ the spirit of our own age. Whatever Christ taught or meant by his teachings, we may be sure that we have got on to something further, else were he. and his teachings of small avail.

FABIAN FUSSES.

Our friends the Fabians have been wonderfully energetic these past few months. They have split up into independent groups, having found that their increase of numbers made a harmonious working under a central executive an impossibility. Still the executive has clung to its existence, and although in reality a thing "of shreds and patches" whose authority is but a jest, it continues to distribute work, and has set the various groups to the congenial task of redrafting old pamphlets. (The Fabians always drop back on old pamphlets as a last resource.) The Government superstition is also kept up in the form of group secretaries, whose duties consist of giving tea-parties to their respective groups and creating local fusses. The society now numbers several thousands, and the chief secretary, we hear, has struck for increased pay. In fact, the popularity of the society is not altogether a thing desired of the original members. Subscriptions are one thing, but lecturers "whose worth is unknown" is quite another, and the executive anxiously hunting round for a member who will undertake to attend all the lectures of the neophytes, in mufti and report upon them to headquarters.

Mr. Jackson ran only save himself from lifelong ridicule by imitating his recalcitrant wife in her defiance of legality, He says his only compliant now is that he cannot marry anyone else. If he can get any woman to have him, we should advise him to go through the ceremony and abide the issues. In that, way he might drive yet another wedge into the crumbling edifice of legal marriage and render his former partner's rebellion more fruitful.

IRSEN'S "GHOSTS" SCARE THE PIOUS -JOURNALIST.

It would seem as if the spirit of Anarchy had been very much rife (hiring the tint quarter of '91. Mr. Grein's opening venture at the Royalty (for the nonce Independent) Theater, Dean Street, on 'March 13, was in direct defiance of the Lord Chamberlain, who had refused to license the playing of Ibsen's 11 Ghosts." But individual will and subscriptions carried the day, or rather the night, and the play was splendidly given before a crowded audience. After the performance the Journalists howled loud and long, and told us that this faithful portrayal of some sordid features of this sordid age, was an outrage upon decency, and foreboded the downfall of dramatic art. Few, if any, of Ibsen's most ardent admirers set up his style or subject-matter as artistic standards. He himself says he writes -with but one object, "to make men think," and perhaps the term of "dramatic pamphleteer" is a more happy expression than the originator of it meant it to be. This, however, is certain, that there can be only one kind of human being who can see immorality or obscenity in an Ibsen play and that kind is the one we hope will some day have become as extinct as the dodo.

IS OSCAR, TOO, AMONG THE ANARCHISTS?

The February Fortnightly Review contained an Article from the pen of Oscar Wilde which might well evoke this question. Wherever -Mr. Wilde studied Socialism, he has succeeded in taking the cream off the various schools, and he is to be congratulated upon his assimilation of what must have been to

prevented from being present by illness. After tea, Comrades Blackwell, Kropotkin, and Louise Michel made informal speeches. Kropotkin, in view of the next day's Conference, said a few impressive words about the coming 1st 'May. He pointed out that unless the workers all over Europe, and in Great Britain, were unanimous in their Demonstrations that day, they would carry no weight with them. The English workers, if they meant anything, should not wait for the 3rd of May to come out in their thousands. Sunday demonstrations would not tell the capitalists what they ought to know, that the workers had a right to take it holiday when it so pleased them. There was no fear of the Capitalists combining to make a universal lock out if there was a universal coming out on the 1st May, because the universal lock-out would be nothing less than the Social Revolution, Songs were then sung by various friends, including C. Morton, N. E. Tipping, Mrs. Tochatti, and other members of the Hammersmith Choir, &c., and a violin solo was given charmingly by Comrade Marsh. The proceedings were further enlivened by recitations from Gunderson, Jun., and others. So passed a social evening which, we hope, will not be the last of its kind.

A SUCCESSFUL CONCERT.

Another very useful and pleasant gathering was the concert arranged by Comrade, Wess at the Berner Club for the benefit of the Freedom Pamphlet Fund. Comrade Marsh and other musical friends gave their services. E. Nesbit (Mrs. Bland) and Marshall Steele recited, and the evening concluded with a sing-song and dance. In spite of dreadful weather, the sale of program- cleared L2 16s., a sum which, with the prepaid Orders sent in by the Autonomie, Knights of Liberty, and other groups, has paid the cost of Freedom Pamphlet -No. 2, stereos and all, and left us a small balance towards No. 3.

"THE ROLE OF AN" OFFICIAL."

"(1)To do nothing. (2) To prevent any one else from doing anything. (3) To invent reasons for (1) and (2). No. 3 involves

work and ingenuity, and it is quite astonishing to see what energy can be employed at times to secure No. 2." So writes J. S. P. to the Times for March 27 apropos of Mr. Raikes and the Boy Messengers. We congratulate J.S.P. on his insight.

A PILL FOR THE STATE SOCIALISTS.

The sight of the Post Office invoking all the machinery of law to crush the Boy Messengers, because the members of that audacious society have actually dared to perceive a public need and on their own initiative set about supplying it, is wholesome medicine for those persons whose Socialism takes the form of a desire to make all branches of industry into State monopolies. barring the pitiful salaries of its wage-slaves, the Post Office has been the stock illustration employed by argumentative Social Democrats, when they would turn us from the error of our convictions with regard to the danger of officialism, the repressive tendencies of red tape, and the need for free individual initiative in matters economic. Mr. Raikes' object lesson will save us some expenditure of breath in future. Imagine a country in which every branch of industry and distribution was under the control of Raikes and Co., and all voluntary associations to supply public needs sternly repressed by law, and you will have some idea of the Millennium whither the path of humanity will be opened by the Fabian blow (when struck).

A HALTING DEFENCE.

Some over-zealous Social Democrats, determined not to be beaten, are suggesting that Mr. Raikes is a public benefactor after all; for if he quashes the Boy "Messenger Company and himself employs urchins to run errands for the public instead, said urchins will be transformed, as they grow tip, into letter carriers, and so for life be provided for with the munificence peculiar to the State, whereas the private company will turn them adrift as mere unskilled laborers. An argument which, like the proverbial swimming pig, cuts its own throat; for if the Post Office requires a larger number of letter-carriers than can be supplied from the boys at present in its employ, and

does not increase its staff of boys by taking over the messenger business, it will be obliged to engage grown wage-slaves from outside, and among these the messengers who have outgrown their boyhood will have a fine chance, in consequence of their knowledge of town and practice in deciphering and tracing out addresses, unless Mr. Raikes sacrifices superior fitness to avenge his dignity, in which extreme case the boys' acquirements will stand them in good stead in gaining a livelihood by the many distributive agencies to which the Post Office still deigns to grant the boon of existence. We defend no company for private exploitation, but an exploiting State monopoly is even worse, if worse can be.

THE QUEEN r. JACKSON, MAN v. WIFE, SLAVERY v. LIBERTY

The extraordinary decision of the Judges of Appeal in the Jackson case, has very much upset the minds of orthodox husbands, and bewildered their still more orthodox spouses. Never was greater back-hander given to law and authority by law and authority! A woman by the simple expression of her will sets at naught a form of legal contract, which centuries of use had made the world regard with superstitious awe, and the highest legal authorities of the land back her up in a decision, which renders the word "husband," in its ancient legal sense, -a scorn and a bye-word. Marriage by legally enforced contract was some stages removed from the rapes of Savage tribes; the present refusal of the law to violently enforce the contract is a significant sign of the growing conviction that union between men and women should depend solely on free consent. The man who would compel a woman by brute force to mate with him should take himself off to those parts of uncivildom, where wooing is still done by means of a club, and the nuptial knot can be pulled to strangulation point by the self-appointed lord and master.

THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY LEFT.