FREEDOM

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THINGS OF TO-DAY.

Whose fault is it?

Governments exist, we are told, as a terror to evil doers, the presumption of course being that they themselves are amongst such as do well. From this point of view it is interesting to glance now and again at the doings of our rulers. One may always profit by observing the conduct of the virtuous.

At the present moment, for example, the English Government are employing a number of men to murder the people and ravage the country of Burmah. The reason? The greed of English traders demands that portion of the earth's surface as a base of operations, if France is to monopolise Tonquin. In other words, if Louis steals, John must be allowed to steal too. In excuse it is alleged there were native tyrants in Burmah. Perhaps; but is that a reason why alien tyrants should take their place? If one man sets upon another in the street, is that a reason why a third should kick off number one, that he himself may have the pleasure of rifling number two's pockets? The vocabulary of private life would furnish us with some energetic expressions to qualify such conduct, but of course the public action of governments is always respectable. Mistaken policy is the strongest term we must apply to the conduct of those sacred persons to whom we allow the privilege of plunging hundreds of thousands of our fellow men into needless misery.

Perhaps, however, Burmah may be an unfortunate exception; let us turn to the relations of our Government with other weak nations.

English money-lenders, in their greed for exorbitant interest, supplied the rulers of Egypt with money to keep the wretched inhabitants thereof in subjection. These rulers used the money to set the Egyptians to work to minister to their own selfish pleasures. Naturally the English capital bred no return, the interest was not paid, and the money-lenders cried out that they were robbed. Whereupon the English Government proceeded to employ some of the wealth it wrings from the toil of the English working-class to force the fellaheen of Egypt to work for the English usurers. That is the real meaning of the occupation of Egypt, behind which the oppressors of the Russian people shield their attempts to extend their tyranny to Bulgaria. We cry shame on the Tzar and his bureaucracy; are our hands so clean? *Ours;* for it is in the name of the English people that these wrongs are committed. It is the labour of the English workers that yields the wealth which enables our rulers to outrage humanity abroad. It is the lives of poor Englishmen, forced by lack of honest labour to hire themselves as man-slayers, that are thrown away in these ceaseless wars of annexation. And it is the so-called representatives of the English people who authorise the crime. Yet, putting the moral disgrace aside, is it the mass of the English nation whose material interests are served by it? Hardly. There has never been a "little war" yet for which the workers have not given their labour and their blood, that the property-holders and traders might reap the advantages. The men who force us to work and to starve for them at home, make us the instruments of their unscrupulous greed abroad. And what better can we expect when by accepting their detestable Parliamentary system we have surrendered our conscience and the guidance of our actions into their hands, as a Catholic into the hands of his priest? If we have not the courage to revolt against our present miserable slavery for our own sakes, let us for very shame revolt against the blood-guiltiness it forces upon us. As long as we are cowards and submit we are responsible for the crimes of the men whom we allow to govern us.

The Thermometer of Revolution.

Everyone knows the game in which one child has to find a thing hidden by the rest whilst he was out of the room. He guesses the whereabouts of the concealed article by the shouts of the others, who cry "Cold," "Warm," "Hot," "Very hot," as he draws nearer and nearer to the hiding-place. If the workers keep a close watch on the fears of their masters they may gain some such clue for their own guidance in their search for the true cause of their degradation and wretchedness.

They may observe, for instance, that the Powers that be take demands for extension of the franchise with much calmness. Reform of municipalities, of the pension list, of the civil service, three acres and a cow, leasehold enfranchisement, employer's liability, even a little talk of the abolition of the House of Lords, and the uselessness and expense of royalty, all leave the middle class and its organs in a very chilly condition. But Henry George scores 68,000 votes for the Mayoralty of New York, and the temperature rises at once. Why? George is a quasi Socialist, a thorough-going enemy of land monopoly, and a man who opposes not only government by bribery, but the interference of rulers in the labour war. Away with such a fellow from the earth then. It is not fit that he should live in middle-classdom.

If middle class opinion was warm about George, it is hot about the S.D.F. and the unemployed. This agitation of the workers for the right of every man to labour that he may eat, is extremely embarrassing to property-owners. It is abundantly evident that as long as the means of production are monopolised by certain individuals for their own profit, there is not work and not bread for all the population; and if the surplus people will not starve peaceably, it is very awkward for the appropriators of this world's goods. Therefore, we see learned divines, and zealous philanthropists, as eager as our friends the Social Democrats in suggesting relief works. Now, as a correspondent lately pointed out in one of the evening papers, Henry VIII. began relief works over 300 years ago, when he had just finished stealing a large slice of the soil of England from the English people. He hanged some thousands of the unemployed, whom he deprived of the land they had tilled; but he could not hang them all, and so he set the rest to fortify the southern sea-ports. There have been relief works, and proposals for relief works, on and off from that day to this, but they have not relieved the people much. Nevertheless, tested by the thermometer of bourgeois fears, relief works are hot. They mean, We cannot, we dare not leave our fellow-citizens to starve. We *must* do something.

It is not the proposal for relief works, however, that calls out troops and mounted-policemen, barricades shop-fronts, and throws "respectable" Society into a panic. It is the sense, sharpened by terror, that the people are groping their way at last to the root of their distress. The simmering spirit of popular revolt shows a growing tendency to set at naught the sacred institution of property, and our rulers openly avow that in defence of property they are prepared to shoot down any number of unarmed human beings in the streets of London. Can the workers need a clearer indication that they are drawing very near indeed to the object of their search?

Courage then, and onwards! We are on the right track. The fears of our oppressors go before us to point the way, and their desperate efforts to guard their supremacy only serve to force the truth upon our brethren who still lie sleeping, hopeless of the day of deliverance. When at last we dare boldly to assert and make good our common claim to the wealth created by the labour of all workers past and present, then indeed, we shall be able to cry "Found!" and the game will be played out for the dominators of mankind.

WHAT MUST WE DO?

If the forecasts contained in our preceding articles are correct; if we are really on the eve of a period to be characterised by great movements breaking out all over Europe, which movements will not only modify the present Governments, but also alter the established rights of property—and the more intelligent people even amongst the ruling classes have not the slightest doubt upon the subject—then the question necessarily arises: What shall the working-classes attempt to realise during the disturbed period we are approaching? In view of the coming revolution, what is their programme?

The ruling classes know pretty well what *they* will do. Their programme is settled; it is to maintain by every possible means their possession of power and the instruments of production. Therefore, they will try first to hinder the spread of Socialist views. If unable to do this, they will try to take hold of the movement, and to give it a direction less dangerous to their privileges. But if, nevertheless, the movement takes a decidedly Socialistic turn, if it grows and becomes a power, if it seriously endangers their monopoly, then they will go on to offer a few concessions more illusory than real, and by these concessions they will try to divide the workmen, to find support amongst the less advanced fractions—privileged themselves—against the more advanced, who will be called "roughs," "the mob," "robbers," and the like. And if the workmen are not well aware of the danger of accepting these illusory concessions, if they let themselves be divided into two camps, then the well-to-do people, without distinction of opinions, will unite together to crush, first, the more advanced fractions, and later on, the less advanced as well, so as to re-establish their power and privileges on a basis as solid as before.

It happened thus on the Continent in 1848, and in this country during the Chartist movement, which had at bottom the very same Socialist tendencies as the movement of the present day.

This programme is plain. Every capitalist and landlord, whatever else he may be—Conservative or Liberal, Monarchist or Republican, stupid or clever—will easily understand it, and he will adhere to it.

But, have Socialist workmen a programme as well-defined and as easily understood as the above? Do they also know what *they* will try to bring about? Do they say, for instance: "*You* will try to remain in possession of the land, the workshops, the railways, the capital, and *we* shall try to take possession of the land, the workshops, the railways, the capital for ourselves, who have produced all these things?"

Unhappily, we cannot say Yes! No programme as definite as this has yet been agreed to, either by the great body of European workmen, or even by the great body of those workmen who do not repudiate the name of Socialist.

Many of these, having no faith in the possibility of even approaching such a solution for many generations to come, do not care at all about it. A few reforms, some laws to protect women and children, some laws to reduce the hours of labour, some help to productive associations—their demands go no further. They have no consciousness of their own force, no belief in the possibility of abolishing privileges sanctioned by centuries of misrule. Taking their own desire for a quiet existence as a universal reality, and cordially hating the noise of the streets and the rags of their own less privileged brethren, they soothe themselves with the belief that everything will go smoothly; that they will never be compelled to quit their fireside, excepting to discharge the duties of a regular voter, and that in this way when the earth shall have completed some two or three hundred revolutions more round the sun, the coming generations will have reached a more perfect mode of organisation.

Others like the noise of the streets; they believe in the power of the masses inspired with a longing for liberty or dissatisfied with their present conditions. They believe in more rapid progress; but they dream that on some fine day the people of England will rise up, will send away the rulers who oppose the wishes of the people, and nominate new ones in their places. Then these rulers, who will be quite another race of men from the present ones, will arrange everything for the best. But what will these new rulers do? Will they all be nominated for the purpose of expropriating the present proprietors? Will they all be inspired with the very same wishes as the masses reduced to misery under the grind-stone of capital? Will they be able from the recesses of Westminster to reform all our present immense, complicated system of industry and trade, production and exchange? Will they have the magic power of improving the position of the workmen, if the workmen themselves do not know what to do for the improvement of their own position? If the workmen themselves have not formulated their wants, and concluded that nothing short of the return of all capital into the hands of those who have produced it can put an end to the evils of our present economical organisation? If the workmen themselves do not find and point out the ways and means by which the restitution of capital to the producers can be accomplished so as to benefit all classes of the community? Is not this reliance upon new rulers the very same old belief as that in a Saviour who will come some day and settle everything for the benefit of humanity? Only it takes the shape of a belief in many saviours, gathered under the old roof of a decaying Parliament!

Of course, the problem which history has imposed on the workmen of our century is immense. It is much more complicated and difficult to foresee new forms of life than merely to maintain what already exists, or to repeat loose phrases from old political programmes. The change of economical relations is a much more intricate problem than a reform of political institutions. But history admits no excuses, no "extenuating circumstances." "Be at the height of the requirements of the moment, or you will be crushed, ground to powder, compelled to pay your deficiency with years of servitude, and may be also with rivers of blood." Such is her verdict, a verdict which she has inscribed in her blood stained annals in 1848 and 1870 in Paris.

We do not speak, of course, of an elaborate programme of action. Any such programme would only impede the freedom of individual initiative. Action must be dictated by the needs of the moment. But what we must do is to express our *wants* in a plain and intelligible manner. Not reduce them to please everybody that would be a childish fancy,—but express what in our opinion are the means of getting out of the great economical difficulties bequeathed to us by our ancestors, plainly speak out as to what ought to be done to free the workmen from their present serfdom to Capital.

It will not do to say merely: Socialism. Socialism becomes a loose word, because in proportion as its force grows, everybody calls himself a Socialist. Many a rotten merchandise is already smuggled in under the red flag, including the "Socialism" of Herr Bismarck, and that of the parson who asks for the bestowal of more charities by the rich upon the poor. It will not do merely to say: Socialism. We must clearly state how far we are prepared to go in rendering to everybody his due share of the common produce.

The wants of the workman *must* be formulated with more precision. But to do so we must first make short work of many a prejudice that has grown up in our minds: the prejudice of Authority, of Law, of Representative Government and Majority-Rule, of the rights of Capital—in short, of all those "great words" which are so many stumbling-stones in the path of Humanity towards emancipation.

A SCENE IN LONDON.

Both of them deaf, and close on eighty years old —
She stone-blind, and he nearly so—
Side by side crouching over the fire in a little London hovel—seven shillings a week—
Their joints knotted with rheumatism—their faces all day long mute like statues of all passing expression—(no cloud flying by, no gleam of sunshine there)—lips closed and silent:

But for that now and then taking his pipe out of his mouth,
He puts his face close to her ear and yells just a word into it,
And she nods her blind head and gives a raucous screech in answer.

NOTES.

The attempt of the local authorities to renew the London coal and corn duties has revealed to the people one of the numberless indirect methods by which they are fleeced by their masters. The Corporation and Board of Works devote these duties (coal, taxed 13d. a ton, brings in £450,000 a-year) to the fair-seeming purposes of town improvements and the purchase of open spaces. But—putting aside all questions of jobbery and and speculation, of "turns" and "bonuses" and "good things" for self and friends—for whose benefit are town improvements chiefly undertaken? The rich dwellers in fashionable districts and the traders of the City, or the poor crowded together in the slums? Pulling down an occasional rookery is about as far as the authorities usually go in in improving poor localities. In this case, as in so many others, the workers pay the piper that their masters may dance.

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It would be well worth the people's while to insist that the grassy hillocks between Hampstead and Highgate should remain undefiled by bricks and mortar, if only to preserve the ancient barrow there, in memory of the days when Londoners were not afraid to fight for their freedom. But why should Sir Maryan Wilson and Lord Mansfield demand £300,000 in consequence? The market value of this land results from the busy co-operation of countless generations of citizens in its neighbourhood, and these two gentlemen, it would seem, have done nothing but be born. Surely the remuneration is somewhat excessive. Especially when it is alleged as an argument for continuing to tax the food and fuel of the workers of the whole town.

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The newspapers have been filled for the last week or two with the domestic affairs of three aristocratic families. Are two people married or not? Were a certain young woman's relations justified in saying that her choice of a husband was indiscreet? If a married couple are unhappy, and one prefers another componion, shall they separate? These are the questions which not only flood the public press with personal details pandering to mere idle curiosity, but occupy the whole time and attention of a number of able men upon whose mental training society has spent a large share of wealth. Nor is this waste of energy a passing aberration. A costly system of procedure, involving gorgeous buildings and the labour of a large staff of hand and brain workers, is permanently devoted to such matters. Is not all this loss and expenditure rather a heavy price to pay for the unsatisfactory arrangement of the private affairs of the upper classes?

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Suits for libel and divorce are luxuries for the rich. A poor man has no chance of healing his wounded reputation with £20,000; and divorce, even when the plaintiff swears himself penniless, costs about £30.

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So much the better for the poor man. No enforced exchange of gold can either wash a black sheep white, or save each one of us from walking "in a cloud of poisonous flies." And as for lovers, they either love each other or they do not. In the first case artificial bonds are but paint on the lily, in the second, union is a ghastly mockery which honest nature promptly destroys. In either case the collective meddling of the community is, to say the least, eminently superfluous.

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The descendants of the Puritans in Kansas, U.S., are not of this opinion, however. They have lately carried the principle of state interference to its *reductio ad absurdum*, and thrown into prison two unfortunate lovers who conscientiously disapprove of contracts enforced by law. Legal forms, separation or captivity, insist these inexorable bigots; as their spiritual ancestors of the rival persuasion used to impose upon heretics the sacraments or the stake. The form of fetish-worship ordained by authority changes, but wherever the rule of man by man is admitted, there is some description of burning fiery furnace ready for all such as refuse to bow down before the image the rulers have set up.

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"Where does your interest come from?" is a tract that may well be useful in rousing the consciences of women of property. It is perfectly true of the majority of such women, and men, that "if capital were a tree planted in an orchard, and interest the fruit with which it was annually laden, they could not take it more as a matter of course." Unfortunately, whilst pointing out that the appropriation of interest by the idle is essentially a robbery of the wage-workers, the author concedes the social claim of able-bodied women to live idly on interest, if they see that their capital is "humanely" utilised.

ON MAJORITY-RULE AS MAKE-SHIFT.

THE AFTERNOON TALK.

Scene: THE AYRSHIRE COAST. *Persona:* CITIZEN and SEAFORN.

Sea. Come, let us sit down here, where the furthest rock of the North Spit faces the incoming Western Sea.

Cit. Good: and the strong thrice thick walls that tower just behind us will stand for the civilisation that protects us. Let us lean on this buttress here.

Sea. Yet we turn our backs on them, and they are ruins. The liveliest strongest things about them are those golden lichen-spots, for they have a free life. But the structure itself, grey and brown and grim, though it frowns defiance on waves and winds and seems immutable, is inevitably crumbling nevertheless. Go back twenty years in memory, come here again twenty years hence, and even in so short a space you will have proof. Do the same by your vaunted fortress of civil institutions. Be historical, that you may be a little more surely and truly prophetical. No; put not your trust in walls of any kind ever so cunningly built, for none are *experience-proof*. Rather turn your face to the rising tide. Here is hope and strength and free prospect. The sea is the true image of that sure and restful continuance which you seek. Experience, like the sea, advancing and spreading, soaks, saps, sinks, and dissolves all. All that has not life enough to float and move on. Now, to begin where we left off this morning, I say that your majority-rule and all it has built up in the past and all it ever will or can build up, are void of this buoyant, elastic, moving life. They must, therefore, sink and melt away, and are doing so now. Otherwise, put in political newspaper phrase, they are not really "practical," useful, and prudent. They do not meet even merely present and passing emergencies with adequate expediency. That is my afternoon thesis, and I nail it up. Pelt it with particulars and details, as many as you like.

Cit. I will begin to riddle it too soon for you, I fear. But, first, do you not talk a little as if Majority-rule had been on its trial for thousands of years, and had been abundantly sifted and weighed and found wanting. Now, we are only just on the edge of real valid democracy, and no more. Even in England and America, one is nearest truth in saying that popular and representative freedom and power, the democratic life, in fact—the Republic, is but beginning to feel its feet and find its tongue. It has built up next to nothing yet—nothing for your judgment to fall upon, if you would not prejudge.

Sea. I am glad you have stumbled over this offence on the threshold of our discourse, for it reminds me to clear up an obscurity that befogs and hinders our free use of history, for criticism of the present, and for forecasting. Boldly, then, and by way of joining direct issue with you, I affirm that whatever has been built up in past times, indeed the whole structure of what calls itself civilisation, has been erected and upheld by the activity of the same principle as now begins to operate in your pet baby democracies. That principle is the spirit of masterfulness—of domineering and over-ruling—the will, not to be free and set free, but to coerce and enslave other will. Majority-rule, whatever fine names it may assume, is only one amongst the many manifestations of this self-will, or will to deny and suppress will. But to serious contemplation, it is almost of no consequence, nay, quite a matter of indifference, whether this evil will shows itself one way or another. All its ways and all its works are alike evil; for its vice is not a matter of degree, but of kind; that is to say, it is essential, absolute, and incorrigible. Any appearance of less or more about it is delusive. Hence, Majority-rule of ever so great a majority is not really better or hopefuller than the Minority-rules, the oligarchies, aristocracies, autocracies, benevolent dictatorships, paternal governments, and the like. They are all, together and equally, shut up in the same condemnation of unreasonableness, inhumanness, and futility. So, when the French and English and American middle-class majority-rulers, in their revolutions, sealed the doom of Aristocracy and Monarchy, they sealed their own; and when Democracy issues the death-warrant of Middle-classdom, it will also issue its own; for each form and degree of masterhood in judging another, pronounces self-judgment. This is self-evident and inevitable, when you see that all foreign governments, whether of more or fewer masters or one only, are simply the manifold cases or variations of the one kind of vicious vain conceit, seeking to establish itself in reality, viz., rule by any number less than all; guidance, direction, management, and ordering of social life, founded upon anything short of unanimity. Therefore, I am entitled to open history almost anywhere and read the condemnation of Majority-rule in the doing and undoing of any other form of over-rule.

Cit. But why so much ado? Don't you rather labour your point? If the Genius of Anarchism thus sits in permanence on the world's judgment-seat serenely judging, and passing infallible sentence of failure and self-refutation upon every effort after social construction that founds on any phase or measure of over-rule whatever, this is a spectacle for silent admiration. Can we do anything more than sit still and look on? It is not even talk that befits, but laughter—broad, long, hearty, and honest—if it be so, that every lordly institution has a spark of freedom, an element of self-destruction, a bit of moral dynamite in the heart of it, that will burst it up, and scatter its dust, always in the name of a new seed-time of free life and growth. Think of the powerful irony of it. It is too jolly!

Sea. Look on and laugh to your heart's content, for jolly it is, and encouraging—recreative for fresh effort. You draw the wrong lesson. There may be no folding of hands in mere onlooking, for ourselves and our wills are the vehicle and medium of that judgment and the executors of its sentences.

Cit. Well, if we must go on, let me say that I think our way of settling things by the most votes is a fair enough makeshift in the case of education, for instance.

Sea. Now there, I think, your shift is a poor one; for compulsion to educate and to be educated, compulsion, by law and under penalty, of grudging ratepayer and wretched parent and unwilling child, taints all your efforts. Are your three pitiful R.'s worth the mischief wrought, the heartburnings kindled? No; let education wait upon unanimity. Have day-schools and night-schools (and play-rooms too), but let them be voluntary both ways, both in respect of support and attendance—a free gift freely accepted. Make your schools efficient and attractive, as you can never do out of enforced rates, and there will be no need of compulsion. But this cannot fully be till the commune schools its own children.

Cit. And sanitation? To leave that over for unanimity is to put off sending for the physician till after your burial!

Sea. All the same; let it, too, wait upon unanimity.

Cit. What, are we to respect the freedom of insane and fanatical minorities like the "peculiar people" and the anti-vaccinationists?

Sea. Yes, respect their freedom, even if they become majorities. More or less, has nothing to do with it.

Cit. What! their freedom to infect and to kill us!

Sea. Yes, just as we respect the freedom of all the drunkards to sap our common life and kill us indirectly, and the freedom of all the Churches to do the same, with their distractions and diversions in favour of another world and against this one and its health and comfort.

Cit. Monster of confusion and perversity! how can you talk so, comparing a small body of Leicester fools to such respectabilities?

Sea. Listen. I would treat them all alike, great and small, respectable and otherwise. I would wait, advise, persuade, educate—always showing myself *friendly*. I would not fine or imprison or in any way coerce. In all such cases, the one thing to do is—in a word—to work for unanimity. In Leicester small-pox will never be so great an evil as the pox of discontent and strife and deceit that is just now spread deep and wide there. So, too, about other possible majority-rulings of the upcoming democracy. Local option to coerce strong-drinkers and enforce a sham sobriety will be and will breed a greater evil than promiscuous and licentious drinking; for it will breed *hypocrisy*, and will drive the drinking into dark places. So every form of majority-ruling only drives licence and rebellion underground; and that is the worst place for explosives. It is also the worst place for those things that tend to corrupt. Yours, therefore, is the worst shift even in dealing with things bad; it affords no healing or conversion. But the will of a majority gives no guarantee that what it seeks to overrule, and confine or suppress, is bad at all. Take polygamy in Utah, for instance. The fact that the Christian States are going against it, proves nothing. A minority may be right: a single man may be right. But to do as the States are doing is always wrong and demoralising, for majorities as well as for their victims, even where the victim is a single man or woman, and happens to be in the wrong. The majority *wills*—it merely wills, always wills—it does not reason, sympathise, understand with the heart; it does not attain to concrete equitable regard; its ruling is never anything but militarism transmogrified. All majority-made law is at bottom just martial law—"obey or be shot."

Cit. But your "unanimity" is unattainable; there must always be some residual coercion.

Sea. How do your English juries—those crowning glories of your glorious constitution—reach the unanimity that is always set before them as their goal and purpose?

Cit. By patience, by taking friendly counsel together, by disinterestedness, and by some amount of yielding or giving way.

Sea. Quite so; and what can be done in the dark, will it be worse and less easily done in the open? Disinterestedness will be secured when the *economical* conditions of social life are changed. Yielding consent and conciliatoriness there must always be, and even in a broader sense "giving way." But is that so difficult where men are not utterly given over to sheer "cussedness"?

Cit. Well, your ideals—your unanimous communes, your happy wholehearted life of combined good-will—are very fair and attractive; but they are only ideal.

Sea. Unattainable, yes. Beyond reach, like the sun, moon, and stars; but you cannot sail the ship without them. True, we Anarchists are not always ready to stand and deliver, when called upon to detail ways and means and plans. That is seamanship, and the ship wants that too for safe sailing, and it will all come in good time. But navigation, which concerns and depends on those heavenly orbs and movements, is also essential. The true Anarchist is at least a navigator. His eyes are set upon the ideals that are above reach. Above reach, they yet draw us on; above reach, they guide us. So, even meantime, Anarchism is, at least, CRITICISM and RELIGION.

Cit. Enough. The sands northward, where a while ago the children were building castles, have disappeared. Their castles erased, the children are going home. Let us go.

Encouraging tidings reach us from the North, where our comrade P. Kropotkine is explaining Anarchism before large and sympathetic audiences. His lecture on the 31st of October in the theatre at Newcastle—the first public exposition of our ideas in that part of England—was attended by over 4000 persons, and many hundreds were unable to obtain admittance. He is now carrying the propaganda into Scotland, where the ground has been already well prepared by the Socialist League.