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POLLING-DAY IN MANCHESTER.

(From our own correspondent.)

Things were very quiet when, at about noon, I arrived in Manchester on Friday. The North-West division of that gloomy city contains within it the London-and-North-Western station, and I stepped straight into the scene of warfare. Almost the first thing I saw was the motor-car of Mr. Winston Churchill, and in it the pale, copper face of the Minister himself beside the bright, black eyes of his mother sparkling under a scarlet hat. Mr. Churchill was looking ill and cheerless, but he raised his hat to an admirer and smiled in his old, confident manner. For another hour or so sights were denied to me. An occasional automobile or trap decked out with party colours, an occasional moment of excitement outside a polling-booth, and then the familiar monotony of a business centre.

It was after the dinner-hour that things began to grow more lively. The hawkers of red and blue rosettes swelled from a few stragglers at street-corners into a vociferous (and prosperous) army; every now and again the stream of people in the streets would run into clusters around some vehicle or individual, and the clusters would grow into a little mob. A suffragette had but to appear in order to be good-naturedly hustled by the populace; and I saw a genial, grey-haired lady, but of a youthful spirit, having the most delightful five minutes of her existence in the heart of a flippant band of youths and laughing working girls. Deeply and eagerly as Manchester feels in politics, the good behaviour and good temper of the crowds were in every way remarkable. In the afternoon most people had given up all pretence of attending to their business. The steps of the Royal Exchange were thronged with spectators; and so were the principal streets and squares and the region of the principal committee-rooms. A constant procession of motor-cars, of vans, of luries, and of at least three four-in-hands passed and repassed; and where there was no political stimulus the crowds jostled one another for the sheer fun of the thing. I went into Stevenson Square, in the centre of warehouses and factory rooms: it is a place that in the past week has acquired a reputation. On the preceding days all the candidates had come there to speak at about that hour, and here the hapless Mr. Hunnab had had a wheel removed from his brougham, his hat stolen, and his comfort destroyed. There had been politics and horse-play,—good-humoured horse-play. I went in search of fun. Surely enough, the crowds were there, youths and maidens for the main part, and in the best of moods. Only there were no politics. The crowds did not know what to do, so they shouted; and, having exhausted their lungs for the moment, they began to push. Loud shrieks from the maidens in the curling-pins, loud guffaws from the youths in the checked caps. The police, scenting disorder, push their way into the thick of it, and the crowd closes in on them. And then, in the very midst of the sea of heads, you saw two helmets projecting like indigo mountains out of a dusty plain, and in a moment you saw them moving backward slowly with the crowd. Louder and louder grow the shrieks and the guffaws. The helmets, having been made to move backwards, are now made to move towards one side. We are very happy; we are hustling the police; and these, instead of losing

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their tempers and laying about them with their truncheons, smile and joke and shew themselves good fellows.

But one can't stay in a crowd for ever. In St. Ann Square, the Bond Street of Manchester, is Mr. Joynson-Hicks' committee-room; there, too, they are aware that an election is afoot. By about three o'clock St. Ann Square was more animated than I have ever seen it. Numberless motor-cars belonging to Mr. Joynson-Hicks' supporters kept coming and going; a bustling throng on the pavement somehow seemed terribly busy doing nothing. I saw a drunken fellow, round as a cask and pink as boiled ham, making a speech; appealing to his hearers to abandon party politics, and, as citizens of the world, looking on mankind as brethren, to vote for Joynson-Hicks. He was indescribably droll; we laughed a good deal. He was of the regular type of electioneering holiday-makers, and now there were more and more of them to be seen on all sides. The rosette hawkers were doing a roaring trade. One after another I asked them which colour they were selling most of, and in every case except one the answer came, "Blue, sir, blue, blue." Blue is Mr. Joynson-Hicks' colour. One little man persisted in trying to sell me red rosettes. "Two to one on the winner, sir; buy one, sir, please." My companion looked at him sternly. "Don't you see we're Socialists?" he said. "Be off." And the little creature retreated quite abashed.

By about five o'clock a persistent rumour had got about that Joynson-Hicks was romping in. Nevertheless I betook myself to Mr. Churchill's safest quarter, Cheetham Hill, where the larger portion of the Jewish vote is housed. The chief feature of Cheetham Hill is the Cheetham Hill Road, a dingy street along whose interminable course great electric trams sweep constantly. Today it presented an unwonted aspect. An immense swarm of Jewish children on each side of the street in every stage of dilapidation greeted each vehicle as it bore along the voters to the booths; booing and jeers greeted the partisans of Mr. Joynson-Hicks, jubilation those of Mr. Churchill. The motor-cars whizzed by at an illegal speed, the children yelled at the top of their squeaky voices, raucous greetings were hurled at one another by the grown-ups, and the dust and the noise whirled round one like a hurricane. In the middle of it dusk began to fall, and, gradually, points of dazzling light appeared along the street, with here and there patches of murkier colour. Half-past seven came, and the quick minutes sped on towards eight o'clock, when the polling closed. Still the motors flew, still the people shouted, still the voters rushed. Eight o'clock at last: it is all over.

As I look out of the packed tramcar which is taking me back to the city I see that we are

cleaving our way through a teeming mass of enthusiasts; and presently there reaches us above the din the plaintive nasal sound of trumpets at a half-penny a-piece. Manchester has begun to "maffick" in anticipation.

Behind us lies the murky aspect of Cheetham Hill like a greyish brown cloud shooting sparks of light.

"Eight o'clock", said a dirty-looking workman next to me. "It's all over." And everybody who could turned out into the streets.

For my own part, I went into the camp of the enemy. Through the kindness of a friend I was enabled to be present at the declaration of the poll at the Reform Club, where the news was telegraphed as soon as it had been announced at the Town Hall. As I made my way there the streets were very full, and outside the club a large assembly of people were standing expectant.

It was anticipated that the news would be out at half-past nine. How were the intervening three-quarters of an hour to be spent? The great room was packed. There were a good many ladies present, and with them boys and girls. We stood chatting; we began to grow restless; we cast furtive glances at the clock. The time hung heavily.

At last a number of ladies and gentlemen make their way to the platform and there is an end to the hubbub.

We try in vain to read the news on their faces, and in vain to make something of their speeches. It is no use. As they themselves confess, they are only a stop-gap.

Meanwhile there is a sound of cheering without. It comes to us with a strangely theatrical effect. One does not care to hear what the people on the platform are saying. Again and again the dull roar of the crowds below reaches our ears. They know what has happened, and we stand wondering.

Mr. Haworth, the member for one of the Manchester divisions, is just in the swing of an eulogium of Mr. Churchill, when a tall man carrying a slip of paper in his hand is at the door pushing his way forward.

He has brought the news. "Joynson-Hicks", he gasps, "429 majority."

Silence, and then every sound of disappointment; groans, mutterings, a general gravity of countenance. What a curiously uncanny thing it is to see a great assembly of people, prepared for rejoicing and tense with expectation, receive ill news!

"If this is true", said Mr. Haworth, and his face looked gloomy with pain, "then it is indeed a dark day".

Slowly the assembly began to console itself, to talk itself into hopefulness. There was now only one thing to wait for—the arrival of Mr. Churchill. In due time he arrives, and delivers a spirited and courteous speech. He has done his best, and he has our sympathy. Let us be true to our principles, he tells us; and, when our cheers have subsided, there is only that strange echo without, ever growing louder and louder.

Alas for Mr. Churchill! His defeat is popular in Manchester.

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