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THE
SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION
OF ENGLAND.

BY

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THE SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION OF ENGLAND.

ON a former occasion * I gave a sketch of the social and political position in England at the present time, and briefly showed how the movement now going on below the surface has been led up to for the past hundred years. Such a sketch was necessarily rough and superficial. Nevertheless, it made plain that in England, the richest European country, the mass of the workers are in a miserable condition of poverty and uncertainty, with no security for continuous employment, even at the low rate of wages they receive—badly fed, badly clothed, badly housed. As matters stand, indeed, the great body of the people are shut out from controlling their own political business, without even the satisfaction of knowing that the classes which monopolize the whole power in the State will be at the pains to care for the wellbeing of the wage slaves, to whose labor they are indebted for the luxury and indolence they enjoy. The wealthy lower orders are really quite indifferent to the problems of the society they control, so long as, at the expense of a little cheap philanthropy, they can bribe the workers not to change the system. What can you expect of men who have no wider range than the discounting of three months' bills, the balancing of yearly accounts, or the acquisition of gain by legalized fraud? The only hope of general and permanent improvement for the many is in a thorough

* "The Coming Revolution in England."—(Wm. Reeves, 185, Fleet-street, London, price 6d.)

social reorganization, conducted with vigor and intelligence by the producing class themselves. The vast wealth which is now piled up by their ceaseless exertions, the powerful machinery which increases the productiveness of labor and cheapens commodities, become, under existing economical conditions, the direct means for insuring the subjugation of the workers to those who own that wealth and control that machinery. The majority of Englishmen are literally enslaved for life to a class of their countrymen by their own production itself. This is true of all nations where the laborers work under the control of capital; but here in England there is a greater concentration of land, capital, and machinery in the hands of the few than elsewhere, consequently, the natural bent of the capitalist system is less checked or diverted by other causes. Until this carapace of monopolies, which crushes down our people, is owned by the State—which will then simply be the organized capacity of the workers, for the benefit of all—no great change for the better can be brought about in the lot of those who labor.

Now this, I dare say, will sound to many abstract, utopian, all in the air. I don't think it will when I have done. In America even, where there is much virgin soil still unoccupied, and rich lands to be purchased at what seem to us preposterously low prices, I can observe that every day the class struggle between the wage-earners and the capitalists is coming closer and threatens to be most bitter. With Americans, as with us, new questions are being forced forward, and people feel that there is something below more serious than the well-worn shibboleths of Republican and Democrat. What we English have to deal with is, at any rate, far more a social than a political problem. Who is "in" or who "out" matters not a straw to those who have learned to labor but cannot afford much longer to wait. Politics are, after all, merely the

outcome of the method of production below, and he who stops to consider them alone gets a superficial view of modern society indeed. For the worst of it is that while we are talking events are moving. Yet another generation is growing up under the deplorable oppression which every man who feels for the misery of his fellows must hate and strive to remedy. Another succession of destitute workers—men, women, children of tender years—are even now stepping into the places of that food for capital which has just been shot into the pauper graveyard.

I need scarcely insist upon the difficulties we have to face. That our social arrangements and our political constitution are altogether behind the extraordinary development of our industry and commerce none can fail to understand. But assuredly there is no patent plaster for all economical diseases—there is no sovereign remedy for the people's evil which can be administered with confidence as an infallible cure. No. Society is the growth of endless ages of evolution and revolution, in the same way as man himself. We ourselves are, of course, the creatures of our surroundings and our education from infancy to manhood.* The individual can to a small extent, as most think, modify his own character. Society can, to a much greater extent, change the surroundings of the present and coming generations by fostering those elements which tend to bring about a rapid change. First, therefore, we must apprehend thoroughly the ills we suffer from and their causes in order that, as the existing mischiefs are swept away, we may offer no impediment to the growth of a new and better state of things from below.

* By education we are most misled.
 We so believe, because we so were bred:
 The priest continues what the nurse began;
 And thus the child imposes on the man.

—*Dryden.*

What we have to-day, I repeat, is a class which owns all the means of production, including the land on the one side. Those who belong to this class escape, as a body, without any sort of manual labor, and live in luxury far in excess of what is beneficial even to them. On the other side is a class utterly destitute of the means of production. Those who belong to this class are, therefore, obliged to compete with one another, in order to gain the scantiest livelihood, and sell their force of labor for miserable wages to the capitalists, who "exploit" it. Hence increasing wealth and deepening poverty, production for profit and not for use, recurring industrial crises consequent upon the socialized system of production and the command by the individual of the whole process of exchange. Authority carried to its extreme limit in the factory, in the workshop, in the mine or the farm: *laissez-faire* allowed full swing in almost every other department of civilized life. Thus the wealthy, who take care to maintain the strictest discipline where their own immediate gains are concerned, howl loudly, in concert with their hangers-on, that freedom of contract is being outraged when they in turn are called upon to submit to some sort of regulation in the interests of the mass of mankind. Between the two classes, the capitalists and the proletariat—the workers, that is, who are absolutely without means of subsistence, and dependent on their weekly wages for bread—there are several gradations; but the antagonism between those who employ and those who provide the force of labor which renders surplus value is becoming more pronounced every day. Events are manifestly tending toward the formation of a party of the people which shall be in opposition to Tory and Whig, Conservative, Liberal, and Radical alike.*

* Those who desire to comprehend thoroughly the problems of our existing civilization should study the late Dr. Karl Marx's masterly work on "Capital." It is no easy reading; but no man competent to form a judgment will, I venture to say, rise from its second or third

Within the past few months there has been increasing evidence of this, and a few instances will not be out of place. The Trades-Union Congress, which met in 1882 at Manchester, fully bore out my views with respect to the uselessness of trades-unionism to the rank and file of labor, so far as the original programme or the main discussions at the meeting are considered. Such political proposals as were formulated might very well have been laid down, and I dare say were laid down, by the middle-class Liberal caucus which has its headquarters at Birmingham. From all sides the capitalist press poured forth its congratulations to the managers upon their "moderation." The secretary was accorded an unanimous vote of confidence, because he had given place to young Lord Lynton on a bill before the House of Commons dealing with a matter which was supposed specially to concern the workers. A delegate who had gone to Manchester with the express purpose of proposing a vote in favor of manhood suffrage found so little encouragement among his fellow delegates that he absolutely thought it better not to bring his motion forward this year. Altogether anything but a democratic assembly one must say. Yet here, in this atmosphere of doubt, feebleness and trimming, a great step in advance was made. When it was suggested by a delegate that an examination should be made into the titles of the handful of gentlemen who have taken possession of the soil of England, Mr. H. W. Rowland, secretary to the London Cabmen's Society, a well known trade-unionist, but also a member of the Democratic Federation, boldly brought forward a resolution to the effect that no

perusal without the conviction that he has been in contact with one of the greatest thinkers of our own or of any other age. The name of Karl Marx is so well known as that of an agitator and revolutionist that his position as a philosopher is sometimes overlooked. Future generations will do fuller justice to his extraordinary capacity, industry and fearlessness than we of to-day.

measure short of nationalization of the land could be accepted as a settlement by the working classes of England. This measure is naturally opposed, both by landlords who see in it the utter destruction of their wealth and territorial influence, and by capitalists who, secretly aspiring to be land-owners, support what they call "free trade in land." Nevertheless, and in spite of the efforts of some of the principal organizers of the congress, the motion was carried by forty-nine votes to twenty-nine.*

Now, of course, I am well aware that nationalization of the land by itself and without a complete reorganization of production in all departments would benefit the workers little, if at all. Still, it is no small thing that the idea of the possession of the land of England—land in country and land in towns, mines, parks, mountains, moors—should be held by the people, for the people collectively, to be used and developed as they see fit to ordain—it is no small matter, I say, that such a reform as this should find acceptance at a wavering congress of "the aristocracy of labor" in place of the middle-class tinkering for individual advantage which has hitherto been forced upon them. For such a vote means that at last the people of England are awaking to the truth that landlords and capitalists together have robbed them of their heritage of freedom and well-being; means, too, that no mere vestry plans for bolstering up the old cut-throat individualism will much longer blind the workers to their true interests as a class. "Each for himself, and the devil take the hindermost," is a

* In 1879, when Mr. Adam Weiler, the London joiner, brought forward a similar resolution, he could not even find a seconder. So that democratic ideas do move in these days, the ridicule and sarcasm of the capitalist press notwithstanding. I may add that the collectivist view, as opposed to peasant-proprietorship, is spreading through the Highlands of Scotland as the only thorough remedy for the existing land system. It was in the Highlands that the Sutherland clearances and other similar infamous evictions were perpetrated.

splendid motto for the employing class. For the wage-earners it means a never-ending and hopeless struggle to keep out of the slough of pauperism and crime.

If, however, the trade-unionists have adopted nationalization of the land, the colliers are again claiming to limit production and to curtail the hours of labour to eight a day. The determination to lessen the output of coal in the Yorkshire coal-field, which is really the chief point in dispute between men and masters to-day, is in every way more important than any struggle about wages; for it involves not merely the right to obtain increased pay, but the right to control production itself. Here at once, the whole economical difficulty is placed before us, if we choose to work it out. Grant the miners the right to say how much coal shall or shall not be brought to the pit's mouth within a given period, and clearly the puddlers have an equal right to determine how much ore shall go into the smelting-furnace, the iron-workers the right to fix how many bars or plates shall leave the forge, the cotton-spinners, as they have also contended, how much yarn shall be delivered per week, and so on through the whole long series of manufacturing operations. Well, it may be asked, why should not those who make all the wealth decide as to the amount of any special form of it they choose to expend their labor upon? I say nothing to the contrary. Far from it, I desire to see the laborers acting in concert and producing for the general good. But that any particular knot of producers should be allowed the power to limit their own production without agreement or concert with their fellows in other branches of trade would manifestly but confound still further the present economical confusion. In this case again, therefore, the workers will be slowly driven to look upon the interests of their class—skilled and unskilled laborers alike—as a whole, seeing that the action of one portion by themselves

may disorganize the entire fabric as completely as the strike of one section of workers may compel a whole factory to stand idle. A few years ago, the strike of the unskilled dock-laborers at Liverpool caused a complete congestion of the trade of that great port for three weeks, and a withdrawal of engine-drivers and stokers would practically suspend, for a time at least, all rapid communication. In this complicated society of ours the whole is, as it were, at the mercy of its parts; but let those parts once be thoroughly combined on an intelligent comprehension of their own joint business, and we have opened up a new industrial era to mankind.

While such ideas are abroad, and such partial combinations are going on among the workers in active employment, a little cloud has arisen in another quarter. How to deal with paupers has always been a great difficulty. Clearly, it is hard that men or women who have fallen into poverty from no fault of their own should be treated as criminals, set to pick oakum, forced to do disgusting or useless tasks, merely, to keep a few from coming for the scanty workhouse food out of sheer idleness. This has been the system hitherto. Now another is growing up under the control of well-intentioned men, who evidently do not see, or do not care for, either the immediate or ultimate result of their policy. In several workhouses the paupers are now being employed on the production of useful articles, not merely for themselves or their fellow-inmates, but for sale in the open market, the paupers who do the work receiving a certain proportion of the money obtained, in addition to their keep. Now this is, of course, a great boon to the poor people who have been driven to accept charity, but are glad to find that they are not wholly useless to mankind. The change in the appearance of the men and women thus employed, as compared to what they were with nothing but hopelessness and a pauper's grave before them, is

described as surprising. Excellent every way, no doubt.

But now look at this admirable experiment from the outside. The goods which these State-supported workers produce have to be sold in the open market. Whatever they fetch over and above the mere cost of the raw material and carriage is so much clear gain to the rate-payers, who have to pay for the maintenance of the paupers in any case. Consequently, the workhouse goods can always be sold cheap. How, then, does it fare with men or women engaged in the same business who have to pay rent, get food, and provide themselves with clothing, out of the profits of their own hand-made wares? Very badly, as I can testify. More than one trade has been completely ruined by this workhouse competition, and many of those engaged in it driven into the ranks of the neediest class themselves. Such is the irony of our present social system. Not a bit worse, however, than when the introduction of a new machine, which should result in increased wealth for all, fills a capitalist's pockets, and sends hundreds, perhaps thousands, of skilled workmen out workless on the labor market as unskilled hands. The very people who rightly contend that this organization of labor in the workhouse is far better than the shameful criminal treatment hitherto in vogue, shriek Socialism, Communism, and begin to call names when it is suggested that labor and production need organization even more *outside* the workhouse, and that were such organization carried out on a thoroughly sound basis, not only able-bodied pauperism but able-bodied sybaritism might be done away. But this competition now set on foot, if, as is quite possible, it is carried into the domain of machine industry, will compel the working-classes to insist upon some general understanding with regard to rate-supported laborers, and thus, perhaps, lead by another route to the same great end of social coöperation. Meanwhile, the field of State employment is extending every day,

though, as in the post office, the lowest possible wages are paid, and a profit is secured wherever attainable.

What, however, are the transition-remedies, as we may call them, which may serve to help on our society to a wider and nobler development? Extension of the suffrage to the whole adult population—the direct control by the electors of the entire political system—the abolition of the monarchy and the House of Lords—the prevention of bribery and log-rolling—these and similar reforms, no matter how thorough, do but give the machinery whereby the people of England may at length become masters in their own house. Mere forms of government, nevertheless, afford no guarantee for social progress. France has universal suffrage, and the ancient nobility has long been overthrown. Yet the *plébiscite* established the stock-jobbing Second Empire, and now the French enjoy a republicanised empire, where the right of the workers to combine is put down with a high hand, as in the case of the strike of the miners at Grand' Combe, and elsewhere. In Germany universal suffrage gives the people a sultan, a grand vizier, and an army of janissaries—what else are the Emperor, Prince Bismark, and the Junkerdom at their command?—while the chief cities of the empire are in a state of siege. In free Switzerland, also, the middle-class dominate completely under republican forms. In America itself the pressure of capitalists “rings,” the undue power exercised by plutocrats who but yesterday were unknown men, and the insidious corruption which creeps through the whole body politic, threatens grave danger to the great Republic of the West. There is no security, then, for the social improvement of the people at large in any political forms, unless those who use them are imbued beforehand with just ideas, and are determined to exercise their influence for the general benefit. Necessary as it is to sweep away the monopoly of Parliament,

which now keeps the working-classes from having any control, it is even more necessary that this should be done with a definite idea of policy for the future.

Here, then, are some of the measures which would at least tend to secure for the rising generation better conditions of existence and a clearer view of their own future course under our present capitalist domination :

First—Free education, compulsory upon all, together with the provision of at least one good meal a day for the children attending the public free schools.*

Second—The compulsory erection by municipalities and county boards of healthy, well-built dwellings, in proportion to the numbers of the working population, with gardens or playgrounds in the immediate neighbourhood—such dwellings to be let at a price to cover the cost of construction alone.

Third—Eight hours or less to be established as the regular working-day in all factories, mines and workshops, the labor of women and children being strictly controlled. The same regulation to apply to all other employés where continuous labor is exacted.

Fourth—All squares or private grounds in the neighbourhood of great cities to be held at the disposal of the community, and thrown open for their benefit.

Fifth—That the railway monopoly should be at once put

* There are few stories more disgraceful in the long infamous record of class greed and class robbery than the seizure by the upper and middle classes of endowments given by wealthy men in the past to insure free education for the poor. The children of these classes have quite ousted the poor from the endowed schools, and there seems little hope of any redress whatever by peaceable and legal means. The classes which stand out against free education do not hesitate for a moment to grasp free education for themselves whenever and wherever they can do so at the expense of others. Even the universities, which should belong to the country at large, have been turned into middle-class establishments. Here again, who is going to look out for the rights of the people—save the people themselves?

an end to, either with or without compensation, as may seem advisable, the railways thus acquired being used to give the greatest possible advantages in cheap transport to all classes of the community.

Such proposals would seem to need little advocacy. Yet not a single one of them is now before our parliamentary wiseacres, nor do the working-classes appear inclined to force them upon their representatives, so hopeless do they seem.

Yet who can doubt that compulsory education, now enforced by many, if not most, of the school boards, should be free? It is to the advantage of all that none should grow up ignorant. Though education by itself does not provide better "hands" for the capitalist, and, as we see in China, may not change social conditions, such education as can now be given, coupled with the general advance in all branches of social science around, could scarcely fail to increase the knowledge of the workers, and at the same time to strengthen their power of combination. Noble Robert Owen, who, early in this century, showed us the right path towards education and industrial organization for the young, never dissociated his educational system from good food, constant pleasure, or, later, from physical industry.* The authority

* Robert Owen was the father of the factory acts, the most beneficent measures ever carried in England. Yet he was himself one of the largest and most successful manufacturers. He was also the leader of modern utopian socialism. Needless to say that, when he tried to develop his theories on a large scale, he was ridiculed and boycotted. A philanthropist, he might be: a socialist—oh, horror! Here is a passage from one of the writings of this truly great man:

"Since the discovery of the enormous, the incalculable, power to supersede manual labor, to enable the human race to create wealth by the aid of the sciences, it has been a gross mistake of the political economists to make humanity into slaves to science instead of making, as nature intends, sciences to be the slaves and servants of humanity. And this sacrificing of human beings with such exquisite physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual and practical organs, faculties and powers, so wondrously combined in each individual, to pins, needles, thread,

which he exercised over both parents and children at New Lanark, though at first met by opposition, was in a few years recognized by the people themselves as the greatest boon. Similar authority must be now used on an extended scale for the benefit of the children of the people whose parents too often, from poverty or other causes, neglect the welfare of their offspring in their most important years of growth. Good food in childhood is even more necessary than good education. Nothing is more certain, also, than that children brought up to work under favorable conditions do not revert to idleness if they can possibly help it. Unfortunately, here comes in the miserable jobbery of our middle-class system often entailing downright cruelty and robbery of food. If, however, the workers once understand that the schools are *their* schools, that they really pay by their labor for the food and education provided, they will soon find the means to have their children properly taken care of and those who neglect them punished. Already the board schools have produced a great effect, and the new generation of workers, imperfect as their education still is, will be able to take quite a different view of life from their predecessors. Health and education together will give a power of resistance which can scarcely fail to be fatal to the class injustice they suffer from.

But, secondly, what is the use of giving education unless the home conditions of the people are changed? Here is a point of the gravest moment. According to evidence collected by the trade-unions, the working-classes pay from one-fourth tape, etc., and to all such inanimate materials, exhibits at once the most gross ignorance of the nature and true value of humanity, and of the principles and practices required to form a prosperous, rational and happy state of society, or the true existence of man upon earth."

In another place he asks where the increased wealth produced by his two thousand five hundred work-people—equal to the amount which could have been produced by six hundred thousand a century before—went to. They did not get it; that he saw clearly.

to one-third of their small wages in the shape of rent. They are liable to be sold out of all they possess and evicted into the street if behindhand with payment, and they absolutely have not, as in the United States, any lien on their tools to enable them to work, or on the results of their own labors for what may be due to them in wages. The lodging of the poor in our great cities is, as I have observed before, horribly bad, and very dear. True, artisans' dwellings acts have been passed and philanthropists have tried to do something. But the acts are under the management of town councillors, aldermen and the rest of the middle-class functionaries, who, elected as they are, never for a moment consider that the health and well-being of the people constitute the real strength of the nation; and the philanthropists in this direction, as in others, are really of very small account in comparison with the work that has to be done. As a general result, therefore, the overcrowding is increasing in all our great centres of industry, while the working-classes who must live close to their work have to pay exorbitant rents to the very vestrymen and employers who own the tumble-down dwellings and manage the parish. What likelihood is there that those who make large profits out of bad, unsanitary house-property will set to work in earnest to bring sound, wholesome dwellings into competition at low rents with their high-priced ramshackle hovels? What factory-capitalist will forego the advantage of being able to evict his work-people from the cottages he owns, should they dare to strike, unless some more powerful body undertakes to do the business for the good of all? So things drag on. Improvement for the upper and middle class: yet more overcrowding, degradation and misery for the producers of wealth. Compulsion, nothing but compulsion, can induce our monopolists to act. And yet the so-called working-class leaders advise their misguided followers to dissociate the trade interests of their

class from any political action. We all know that a well-built, wholesome dwelling is absolutely essential to health and decency. How can a woman bring forth healthy children surrounded by such sights and sounds and smells as are to be found in the courts and alleys of our great industrial centres? How can the children themselves become valuable citizens under such conditions? In the country similar compulsion is needed from the same causes. There is more air and perhaps more water, but the sanitary arrangements are utterly abominable in many cases, and the overcrowding goes on there too. Nevertheless, I repeat, the idea of compulsion revolts the middle-class mind, and the vested-interest-mongers so far have had it all their own way.*

But if free education and the provision of food for children, the compulsory construction of sound dwellings which shall be rented at cost, savors of socialism, what is to be said of an eight-hours-act? Sir Stafford Northcote, the leader of the Conservative party, and Mr. Henry Fawcett, the principal middle-class economist and Postmaster-General as well as a Radical, have both recently declared that "freedom of contract" is too sacred to be tampered with. Fancy freedom of contract between a pauper and a plutocrat; between starving women and children and factory lords and "sweaters"! The thing is absurd. Our system of contract actually excludes freedom, and well our capitalists know it. Yet we have made

* It is nothing short of exasperating to read through the answers of witnesses and the report of the recent committee on artisans' dwellings. All the evidence goes to show that a thorough change of system is needed, but no suggestion do we find to the effect that such a change should at once be made. Marvellous indeed is the patience of our people, when crowded together in attics and cellars; they can see the west end of London almost deserted for at least three months in the year, and could learn easily that, cubic space for cubic space, their dens are more highly rented than the most fashionably-placed houses of the well-to-do. Supply and demand, how good is it.

some progress in the restriction of this illusory freedom, and neither Conservative statesman nor Liberal economist dare bring in a bill to repeal those factory acts which happily interfered with the excessive overwork of women and children for the profit of the capitalist. Limit the hours still further to eight hours a day, would not the women and children be the better for it? Yet if women and children are to work but eight hours a day the work of the men stops too, so completely is the whole of the great machine-industry dovetailed together. Who will contend that eight hours' work a day in the factory, in the mine, in the workshop, in the sweater's den, is not enough for any man or woman? A horse can barely work eight hours a day on the average of his strength. But the difficulty is to prevent even the existing acts from being over-ridden. There are not nearly enough factory inspectors to keep the capitalist class within the limits of the law. But when Sir William Harcourt, the Home Secretary, was asked not long since to appoint some more, he replied that any addition to the number would be too expensive. Once more the money interests of the few outweigh, with both the existing parties, the life-and-death interests of the many.

To assume that railways and railway directors will ever be controlled by the existing Parliament would seem to all who know the strength of the railway interest in the House of Commons a foolish assumption indeed. Our railway magnates are almost as powerful as American Jay Goulds and Vanderbilts. They work their men such long hours in the signal-boxes, on the engines and at the points, that accidents frequently occur from this cause alone. The injurious monopolies they have been granted by landlords and capitalists are supposed by them to be permanently valid against the whole country. So long as debenture-holders and stockholders are satisfied, what have the public to do with their business?

Such is the tone of the railway directors ; and Parliament, as at present constituted, is merely a huge board for the protection of vested interests.

The opening of squares and private parks to the inhabitants of large cities is a much smaller matter than the others. But here again the antagonism of class interests, the sharp social separation, make themselves felt. Though the children of the poor have nowhere but the crowded, airless thoroughfares to play in, what right have they to intrude on the premises of the wealthy? A few running-over cases weekly cannot possibly be pleaded as an excuse for bringing these unwashed youngsters between the wind and our gentility. Well may nationalization of the land, whether with or without compensation, seem downright robbery to people who resolutely oppose a simple reform like this.

Thus, even with regard to such measures as those mentioned above, which only tend to improve the health, morals, education and general welfare of the nation as a whole, we are met at once with a dead, dogged, brutal resistance by the classes which live on the labors of others—a resistance, as I believe, only to be overcome by force, or the threat of force, on the part of the wage-earning class. Justice has too long been appealed for in vain. Yet not one of these measures goes to the root of the social difficulty of the time. They are all, as I have called them, mere transition-remedies for some portion of the misery which now we see. Can we wonder, then, that daily, in England, the numbers of those are increasing who hold that what we need is a thorough, organized movement for the overthrow of a social system which enables the rich to obstruct every reform that can really improve the lot of the poor? Is it any matter for astonishment that when admittedly “practical” measures are postponed *sine die*, those who suffer begin to consider what effect a thorough theoretical reconstruc-

tion might have on their condition? Perhaps, after all, this is one of the cases in which the whole is more easy to get than the half.

Some there are, however, who contend that the workers have themselves to thank for the hopeless state in which too many of them are sunk. Their theory is that the poverty of the great majority, in comparison with the vast wealth around them is due to drunkenness, extravagance, want of thrift. Who can deny that drunkenness exists? But to what is it due? When I look around me at the social conditions in which the workers live, when I take account of the fact that there are so few opportunities afforded them for healthful pleasure, when I note that the public-houses—there are far too many of them, no doubt—are the only places where workmen can conveniently meet their fellows, I wonder that, as a whole, the very poor should be as temperate, as saving, as quiet, as contented, as they are. Misery drives to gin, as well as gin to misery. And what are the figures? What is there to show that the upper, the middle, the shop-keeping class, do not drink quite as freely, and more expensive drinks in proportion to their means, than those who are directly laboring with their hands? There is no trustworthy evidence on this point at all. But the temperance cry—good enough in itself, to a certain length, at any rate, for all classes—serves the purpose of the capitalist class to divert attention from the real causes of the whole social depression which engenders the drunkenness, the misery, the pauperism that they so hypocritically deplore.

Take a hundred children at random from the middle class, belonging to staunch members of the Blue Ribbon or Salvation Army, and plant them from infancy in the miserable dwellings which are inhabited by the very poor; let them imbibe a little gin with their earliest pap, hear oaths from their childhood,

and witness scenes of vice, or even crime, as they enter on mature years. Will not a large percentage of them turn out drunken, dissolute and worthless, be their parentage ever so respectable, the sobriety of their whole kith and kin beyond dispute? Of course we know it would be so, and education might do but little to mitigate the effect of this early training. Reverse the process, and take a hundred babes of the poor into such households as might be readily found for them, take care that they were surrounded by kindness, purity and plenty of food for the asking, is it not certain that but a small percentage would have a tendency toward what is bad, until driven, perhaps, to desperation at a later period by the long, hopeless resistance to economical pressure which forces them into the ranks of the needy and desperate? To lecture and denounce the drunken and extravagant, while maintaining as beneficent, the system which is opposed to the best interests of mankind at large, is to mistake the effect for the cause, is to try to perpetuate the very mischiefs which we are endeavouring to uproot. Much of the very drunkenness we witness is due to the vile, adulterated drinks which are sold. But the brewers and gin-distillers are the pillars of the State. Philanthropists and members of Parliament, how shall they be effectively assailed? The publicans whom they employ but follow humbly in their wake. The truth is, that though it may be advisable to restrain the sale of intoxicating liquors (and the fanatics of temperance are in their way doing some good), the social arrangements themselves are really in fault, and drunkenness, like vagrancy, is due to social blundering.

Thrift, again, though good in itself, does but strengthen the domination of the capitalists under our present system; for the savings of the workmen go into the general banking business, and the workers, for the sake of a trifling pecuniary interest, lose sight of the far more important interests of their class as a

whole. The same objection applies to coöperation among knots of workers. Those who take shares earn a profit which they divide, thus becoming at once not mere benefactors of themselves and their families, but copartners with the men who live upon the unpaid labor of their class. None can regret the defects of the workers more than those who are striving for a complete reorganization of society. If they were all temperate, thrifty, ready to combine, democrats would stand a far better chance of organizing side by side with them the great class struggle of the near future to certain and rapid victory for the laborers. The hungry and the drunken, the dissipated and the brutal, may make riots and rebellions, but a class revolution, with a definite constructive programme, is far beyond their grasp. For this reason, if for no other, any attempt which may be made to reduce the standard of comfort should be vigorously resisted.

Before, however, the people as a whole can thoroughly organize their national production, or make common cause with their class in other countries, they must clearly understand, in some degree at least, the history of the economical development which has brought about their present condition. This is, unluckily, no easy matter even for the educated. Middle-class economists have succeeded in so thoroughly confusing men's minds that it needs some effort to throw aside their jargon, and to look upon events as they really have happened and do now take place. According to them our present form of production and exchange has been practically the same throughout the ages, and society at all times may be measured by the same standard. The difference, according to them, is in size only, not in kind or degree. This is the exact reverse of the truth, though doubtless our whole civilization is the result of one long, continuous development, and portions of our present growth may be traced into remote antiquity, side

by side with very different social conditions—just as our great machine-industries are contemporaneous with the miserable Australian nomad, the American Red Indian, with village-communities in Asia, or feudalism in Japan. Historically viewed, nevertheless, our existing system differs fundamentally from any which has gone before.

England, for instance, during the Middle Ages presented a very different appearance from the England which now we see. That age of chivalry about which Burke grew so eloquent, when it served his turn to denounce the principles he had previously championed, formed a strange contrast to our society of to-day. But in no respect was the contrast greater than in the manner in which what was needed for the purposes of every-day life was produced and exchanged. The relations between the various grades in that feudal society and the individuals who composed them were purely personal. Payments were made in kind, service was rendered on one side or the other in accordance with personal obligation; production was carried on, in the first instance, at any rate, for individual use. A certain proportion of the crops was surrendered by the agriculturists, not as rent, but as dues; not as a rate, but as a tithe to be applied to purposes and arrangements which were well understood by both parties. The nobles owed the same allegiance to their superior, or monarch, that their own people owed to them. There were plenty of grievances, and we had risings in England similar to those of the Jacquerie in France, though hitherto our historians have been at little pains to work out the true character and details of these movements.

In the fifteenth century villenage and serfdom had come to an end, and the soil of England was in the hands of the people themselves, subject only to the recognized dues or regular service in the field. The nobles were no more owners of the land than the people or the monarch. Each class had

its rights, subject to the performance of certain duties, which were, as already said, purely of a personal character. At this time the instruments of agricultural labor or of manufacture were poor and rude, suited to the wants of the isolated workers. The yeomen and life-holders produced for the needs of their wives, children, families, and hinds. Those hinds were themselves possessed of plots of ground. Day-laborers formed a small, an unimportant, part of the population. The cattle, sheep, pigs, geese, etc., all that made up the agriculturist's wealth, represented to him not goods which we should sell and make a profit from, but actual substance which enabled him and his to live in comfort or in rude luxury. The women, the wife, the daughters, the hand-maidens, spun the wool of the farm, or attempted rude embroidery in the same way for use or personal adornment; exchange was not thought of until the wants of those around were satisfied, and only the superfluity was actually brought to market. Everybody, or almost everybody, in the poorer class owned his own means of production, and the spinning-wheel of the matron, the potter's wheel, the rough smithy, the still rougher cobbler's shop, formed the manufacturing portion of this rural community. Production for general exchange was almost unknown, each neighbourhood supplying most of its own wants. In the towns exchange had already become more common, but it was in no sense an exclusive business here as it had already become in Venice or Genoa, where also the first modern manufacture in its more extended sense found a footing.

This happy state of things for the many—happy it was according to old chroniclers—could not be of long duration. Already business for profit had obtained a footing, and goods were being produced with a view to their exchange. The middle-class had begun to gain ground, and soon became strong enough to obtain those laws against laborers some of

which have lasted to our own day. Meanwhile, the Wars of the Roses impoverished the nobility, leading them not only to discharge their retainers, but also to uproot from the soil those who had a better right to it than they, in order that wool might be grown for the increasing Flanders market. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the process of tearing off the hold of Englishmen from their own land went on, while the needy peasants who were thus turned loose on to the highways were forced by law into the control of the middle-class, now possessed of the means of production and developing the system of small workshop manufacture. From this to the preponderance of the capitalist farmer, growing crops and cattle for profit on the land, and of the capitalist over the whole domain of production and exchange, was an inevitable transition. The landlord lost all sense of personal connection with his people or their lands. He became merely a sleeping partner with the farmer, the coal capitalist, the factory-owner in the exploitation of the agricultural laborer, the miner, the factory-hand. Thenceforward the capitalist has been the master of our modern society, production has been carried on solely with a view to profit by exchange, the workers have been regarded simply as "hands," to be used to the greatest possible extent for the enrichment of the capitalist. He, therefore, who, in England at any rate, strikes merely at the landlords or the land monopolists tilts at windmills.* The private ownership of land was as inevitable a

* In Ireland, of course, circumstances are different. There the landlord has in most cases rack-rented the cotters direct. But peasant-proprietary under present conditions would only strengthen the gombeen men and small money-lenders. All over Europe and in India the money-lender, in the shape of the Jew, the Soucar or the mortgage-bank is pressing upon the agriculturist. Even where the land is "nationalized," as over the greater part of India, the same blood-sucking capitalism goes on. The crops are mortgaged instead of the

portion of the evolution as the private ownership of the other means of production up to and including the most complete improved machinery, whether for agriculture or manufacture. Control capital, and landlordism falls of itself; break down landlordism, capital may be yet more powerful.

The effect of this development has necessarily been to render the workers more and more the slaves of their own production. First came the coöperative workshop where the individual workman did his bit in forming a complete article, only useful according to the social conditions of the times when put together. This is the system which Adam Smith has so glorified, though its result manifestly is to make the worker "a portion of a machine of which the parts are men." The employer sat by and took the product of the labor, for which he paid only a small proportion of its real social value. Here, at once, was a complete change of method. In place of the isolated worker owning his own means of production, and owning also the product when complete, we have the socialized worker who owns nothing but his bare force of labor which is used in concert with others; the entire product belonging to the employer. As the coöperation extended machines came in. These, too, naturally passed into the possession of the capitalist. Steam motive-power followed the same direction.* The workers now no longer serve or help one another as individuals; they themselves simply serve

land. Thus, as I say, nationalization of the land can only be useful to the people as a portion of a complete collective system of production which will include capital, communication, credit, and machinery.

* The history of the extraordinary industrial development of England, from Hargreaves' invention of the spinning jenny in 1764 onwards, has to be yet fully written. Its effect upon the physical condition of the working classes may be studied in the terrible evidence and reports of the various commissions as well as in those of the health officers and factory inspectors.

the machine through which they embody their force of labor in the commodity produced.

Now suppose a new machine invented which lessens the amount of labor, and therefore cheapens the goods. How does it work under our present system. The capitalist competes by reducing prices. His object is to undersell his fellows as quickly as possible, but always at a profit to himself. To do this he must get a wider market and sell cheap too. Consequently goods are produced at high pressure until there comes a glut, and the industrial army of reserve is increased by the forced idleness of men who cannot sell their labor, owing to the introduction of new machines and the refusal of capital to produce except at a profit. But there can be no profit where there is a glut. Thence an industrial crisis, owing to the fact that the socialized method of production revolts against the individual system of exchange, to the injury of all.

“Then follows a partial recognition of the social character of production by the capitalists themselves; the great engines of production, and the great highways of the country are taken possession of, first by companies with many shareholders, then by the State.”*

Thus, as the feudal nobility lost power by the very methods they used to strengthen and enrich themselves, so the middle-class is being in turn displaced by salaried officials, and in the next stage of the organization of production will themselves be useless.

What a waste of strength, then, it is for the workers to expend their funds in maintaining men on strike for higher wages. Why, it is the wages system itself that crushes them, and never will they, as a class, know what true freedom and real independence are until they break it down. Let the workers spend what money they can afford in obtaining control

* F. Engels.

of political power for their class, and use this power, when obtained, to take possession of the entire means of production. This would benefit, not themselves alone, but even the idlers and the vicious who now live upon their labor.

Can anything possibly be worse than the existing system? We have seen its effects upon the workers in the country where capital has most power. For them any change must be beneficial. Necessary as this stage may be in the process of human development, capital contrives to exact more labor, and to brutify the lowest grades of the population more completely than any method of forced work known. But what is the result to the soil, to our cities, to our general surroundings? England is now supplied with food and raw material from other countries; draws from them interest on capital lent. In America wheat centre after wheat centre is worked to sterility while we sweep the phosphates down into the sea which might fertilize our impoverished lands. In Australia the like process is going on, to the permanent injury of the Continent. In India—but the ruin of India by our capitalist system is an awful lesson by itself. Meanwhile, everywhere forests which perhaps can never be replaced are cut down for fuel, for sleepers, for timbering mines, regardless of the mischief wrought to the climate and the next generation. Everywhere the same rampant individualism, utterly indifferent to the general good; everywhere the same furious greed for gain, reckless of what may befall. And what of our cities? Men of artistic training see no hope of great art under our present social arrangements. Such a man as William Morris, the poet, is driven to look below for some remedy for the hideousness thrust upon him, as democrats are driven to look below for the means of overthrowing the social miseries due to our system of production. Monstrous factories and squalid hovels, blank, featureless houses, and ghastly advertisements, elevated railroads

and a net-work of telegraph poles, such are the decorations of our cities; one long vista of almost irredeemable ugliness, in which each can vie with his neighbor in parading his individuality in order that he may sell at a profit. Scamped buildings, adulteration in every form, cheapness and nastiness and ugliness in every direction.* And all for what? All in order that the few may live in luxury and the many exist as we know. The loss to society by the mere cramping of human intelligence cannot be estimated. What sense of beauty, what exquisite artistic faculties, what power of invention may not lie dormant in millions who may now have not a moment left free from grinding and degrading toil? The greatest discoveries and the noblest inventions have never been made for gain. A Faraday, a Simpson, a Newton scorns to trade upon the welfare of the mass of mankind. How many a great idea, turned to account in hard cash by the capitalist, has been, as it is, stolen from the poor enthusiast who worked for something higher than mere greed.

* "Why are cotton, potatoes, and gin the pivots of bourgeois society? Because they need least labor to provide them, and they are consequently at the lowest price.

"Why does the minimum price decide the maximum consumption? Is it because of the absolute utility of these articles, of their intrinsic utility, of their utility so far as they answer in the most useful manner to the needs of the workman as man, and not of the man as workman? No, it is because, in a society founded on *misery*, the most *miserable* products have the fatal prerogative of serving for the use of the greatest number.

"To say now that because things the least costly are most used therefore they must be of greatest utility, is to state that the widespread use of gin, in consequence of the small cost of production, is the conclusive proof of its usefulness; it is to declare the potato to be as nourishing to the working classes as meat; it is to accept the existing state of things.

"In the society of the future, when the antagonism of classes has ceased, when there are no more classes, use will no longer be determined by the minimum time of production; but the time of production devoted to an article will be determined by its utility."—*Karl Marx, Misère de la Philosophie*, p. 41.

But whether we like it or not, whether we try to help it on or not, whether we shall live to see its victory or not, the movement of the people goes steadily on all the same.* The antagonism of classes is becoming too serious to be concealed any longer. In England, where the causes of hostility are deepest, the attempt at reorganization must first be made. This is the revolution which, sooner or later, we have all of us to face. That it may be brought about in a peaceful and orderly manner every Englishman must hope; that the dominant classes will be wise in time is the best that can be desired for them. But the time is fast approaching when every man must take his side, and strive for slavery with the landlord and the capitalist, or for freedom with the people.

- * Vous triompherez des tempêtes
 Où notre courage expira ;
 C'est en éclatant sur nos têtes
 Que la foudre vous éclaira.
 Si le Dieu qui vous aime
 Crut devoir nous punir
 Pour vous sa main ressème
 Les champs de l'avenir.

It was this idea of Béranger's I tried to express at one of our great anti-coercion meetings in Hyde Park: "And so, when we, the small men of our time, pass unregarded to the rest of the tomb, this holy consolation shall close our eyelids in their never-ending sleep—that though our names be forgotten our memories will be ever green in the work that we have done, and the eternal justice we have striven for."

