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THE  
COMING REVOLUTION  
IN ENGLAND.

BY

H. M. HYNDMAN,

AUTHOR OF "THE SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION OF ENGLAND," "TEXT  
BOOK OF DEMOCRACY," &c.



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## THE COMING REVOLUTION IN ENGLAND.

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ENGLAND at the present moment affords beyond doubt the best field for the study of the social development of our times.\* To a superficial observer we are still the Chinese of Europe, clinging to old forms and old reverences, which have long since been discarded elsewhere; though a closer examination shows clearly that we have entered on a period of change which will probably carry us far in advance of anything yet seen, either in Europe or America. Few educated Englishmen, if pressed for a deliberate opinion, would deny that there is every likelihood that a complete social and political reorganization will be attempted in these islands before the end of this century. Even among the useless men and women who dub themselves "society," an undercurrent of uneasiness may be detected. The dread word "Revolution" is sometimes spoken aloud in jest; more often quietly whispered in all seriousness. The luxurious classes feel that there is something going on below which they do not understand, while now and then the truth that they are after all but a handful of drones amid a dense swarm of ill-housed and underfed workers forces itself in dimly upon their minds. "Of course," said one lady, "we know the working classes can overwhelm us if they are only organized, but what is to come then?" The deluge was to her but a swollen brooklet compared to this loosing of the waters of democracy.

\* See "The Social Reconstruction of England," (W. Reeves, 185, Fleet Street, London, price 6d.)

Now this growing consciousness of weakness if, if, if—this or that takes place, which sooner or later is allowed to be certain to come, acts itself as a force on the side of the people. The “it will last our time” sort of men soon go to the wall in days of real popular excitement. Those who refuse to look thoroughly into the problems of their own age and country, cannot fail to make grave mistakes when brought face to face with the relentless necessities of social evolution, or even with a body of enthusiasts who know their own minds. Ignorance and cowardice invariably engender spasmodic injustice and hap-hazard cruelty. And the worst sort of ignorance is that which neglects to take account of natural laws, the most hopeless cowardice that which leads men to shut their eyes to approaching danger.

Among the upper and middle classes in England to-day there is absolutely no ideal for the future of their country. There is not a single idea stirring among them which can give hope to the old or can fire the young. Materially it is the same. Neither of the present organized Parliamentary parties offers to the mass of Englishmen any real change for the better in their own condition, or proposes measures which hold out the prospect of a brighter lot for their children. The bills before the House of Commons at this hour exclusively concern the welfare of the middle class, consequently there is an utter apathy in relation to them among the workers. What does a man who has to keep his wife and children on a pound or less a week care about the provisions of a bankruptcy act, or the assimilation of borough and county franchise? All he knows is, that somehow or other he has to work day in and day out to keep body and soul together; that to-morrow he may be unable to earn even the scanty pittance he at present gets; and that then, from causes quite beyond his own control, he may have to exchange the squalid misery of his home for the



yet more squalid misery of the workhouse. No doubt such a hand-to-mouth workman rarely reflects on his social wrongs; but, when he does, from thought to action will be a very short step.

Events just now move fast. Landlords, for instance, can scarcely help observing that in Ireland, despite coercion acts, a revolution is being wrought which can be but the beginning of a complete change of system. At first the movement was only a middle-class agitation, yet see what has been done in two years. The farmers are still discontented, but already, ere they are pacified, the day-laborers make themselves heard. Those who imagine that the working classes in England will not be influenced, in the long run, by what is going on in Ireland, take a very short-sighted view of the situation and its surroundings. However favorable the conditions may be, this kind of political yeast ferments slowly through the great unleavened mass of the people; but it does its work all the same. The undefined fear that this may be so accounts for the uneasiness referred to. What if similar steps should be taken on this side of St. George's Channel? What if Englishmen and Scotchmen should call to mind that though the land of Ireland is held by 12,000 people against 5,000,000, the land of Great Britain is owned by only 30,000 against 30,000,000? What if those who live on the starvation wages graciously accorded them by the hypocritical fanatics of supply and demand, with never the hope of rising above the wage-slave class—what if they, ground down under the economical pressure into a depth of degradation inconceivable to those who have not witnessed it, should demand the fruits of their labor from the classes who live in luxury on the produce of their toil. What indeed? At the very thought of it a chill shudder creeps down the back of the land monopolists and the capital monopolists alike, and they cry aloud in chorus for

more and yet more tyranny in Ireland, and huddle together into a "Liberty (!) and Property Protection League" here. For they know, if "society" and the workers don't, that the interests of the producing classes on both sides of the Irish Channel are the same, and that should a struggle commence, it will be a furious class war between the capitalists and middle class aided by the landlords,\* on the one side, against the working class aided by a few thinkers, enthusiasts, and ambitious men, on the other—a struggle beside which the old fight of the burgesses and men of the "new learning" against nobles and clergy would seem child's play.

He who writes the history of class wars writes the history of civilized peoples. A new, and—unless far more wisdom and foresight is displayed by the well-to-do than now seems likely—a bloody page of that history may ere long be turned over with us here in the "Old Home." In such circumstances what course should be taken by any man who wishes well to his country? Surely to try to read aright the signs of the times, and to endeavor to convince others near and far that in such a battle surrender is both nobler and safer for the weaker party than inevitable defeat. As an Englishman who has had special opportunities of watching our social growth from many points of view, I venture to think that the following pages may be of some interest to the great English-speaking

\* Among the wiser leaders of the Conservative Party in the past there has always existed some sort of vague hope that an alliance might be formed between the landowners and the people against the capitalists. Mr. Disraeli certainly had this idea. But to carry it into effect called, and calls, for sacrifices of which our English nobles and squires are quite incapable. They talk boldly of patriotism, but they always keep their hands tight clenched in their breeches pockets. Of late this whole policy has been thrown aside with contempt, and Lord Salisbury and Sir Stafford Northcote make no secret of their anxiety to make common cause with the plutocracy in favor of the "rights of property" against the rights of the people. A Conservative programme truly.

democracy on the western side of the Atlantic Ocean as well as to our own people here.

It is a commonplace to say that a hundred years is a short period in the life of a nation, yet few perhaps reflect how short it really is. A man of seventy in this year, 1883—and now-a-days our English statesmen are, so to say, in their “teens” at fifty—might have conversed as a youth of eighteen with his father, who, if he had then attained likewise threescore and ten years, could retain a clear personal remembrance of the events of the American War of Independence, and must have passed through the era of the French Revolution in the prime of manhood. Thus considerably less than two ordinary lives carry us back to a date which, in certain respects, social and economical, seems as remote as ancient history. It needs an effort of the imagination to recall what England was in 1783. Nevertheless, those who have studied the years immediately preceding the great war with France know well that at that time the opinions of educated men were to a great extent in advance socially and politically of what they are to-day. The writings of Thomas Paine, Priestley, Horne Tooke, Thomas Spence, of Newcastle; the speeches of the elder Pitt, Burke, Fox, Sheridan, and Colonel Barré, to say nothing of the crowd of pamphleteers who in one way or another reflected the ideas of Rousseau and Voltaire and the general tone of the working classes in their ordinary talk, all shadowed forth a political movement in England not very widely different in its objects from that which wrought so great a change in France. A hundred years ago the Duke of Richmond fathered a bill in favor of universal suffrage and annual parliaments, and Thomas Hardy the shoemaker was tried for high treason because he agitated for a National Convention. It is certain that the mass of Englishmen, so far as they could give expression to their opinion, fully sympathized with the early phases of the



attack upon the *ancien régime* in France, and would gladly have followed up the policy so successfully begun in America and carried on by the French in the direction of a complete enfranchisement of the people.

Yet here we are to-day without reforms admitted to be necessary by Lord Chatham, and considered with a view to bringing them forward from a Tory point of view by his reactionary son. The present House of Commons, though supposed to represent thirty-five millions of people, is really elected by a little over three millions; the House of Lords still has the power, as it so disastrously showed in numberless instances, of thwarting, for a time at least, any genuine liberal measure carried by the so-called popular chamber. The House of Commons itself also, elected as stated, consists of a compact phalanx of landlords and capitalists, whose interests are directly opposed to those of the great body of the people. What Thomas Paine called the game of ride and tie still goes merrily on. Tories and Whigs, Conservatives and Liberals, take turn and turn about in cajoling their constituents, and enjoy the sweets of office as the reward for their dexterity. The cost of elections and the nonpayment of members shut out all but men of the well-to-do classes, or the two or three specimens of the working class who are ready to do their bidding. Now it is clear that there must be some great causes to account for this remarkable set-back, since the revolt of our American colonies, and the teaching of vigorous minds, both in England and abroad, led the English democracy to look to a thorough reform of the constitution, or even to the establishment of a Republic as not only advantageous, but necessary.

Mere political reaction will not fully explain such a strange collapse. Doubtless the war against France, into which the nation was dragged by the aristocratic class, had a great effect. The horror, more than half manufactured, which was felt at

the fate of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette, helped the reactionists and the war party. Burke and others did their utmost to fan the flame. The Reign of Terror in Paris, exaggerated by the calculated panic of the upper classes intensified the popular feeling. And of course when once we were fairly at war the old dogged spirit of the victors of Crécy and Poitiers was roused, the fatal mirage of glory tempted the suffering people on, and internal reorganization was practically thrust aside in favor of naval triumphs and glorious battles. If we lost, it would never do to be beaten like that; if we won, why, all was going well. Hurrah for old England! To this day, also, the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror are quoted in almost every middle-class household as standing warnings against any attempt of the people to organize themselves in earnest.

Who shall say, moreover, what an influence the common school-books have had in this direction? Till within the last few years all history for the young has been compiled in the direct interest of reaction. Not the least noteworthy, therefore, among the smaller signs of coming change is the fact that at the present moment efforts are being made to correct the ideas which have been current with regard to the leaders of the French Revolution among the working class. Lectures are constantly delivered and pamphlets distributed in the growing radical and democratic clubs, which run quite counter to the middle class idea of that great upheaval. Robespierre, St. Just, Couthon, and even Marat are rehabilitated completely, and held up to admiration as men who sacrificed themselves to the good of the human race. This, too, though they themselves all belonged to the very class which the extreme advocates of the rights of labor commonly denounce.

But deeper causes have been at work than the shock of the Reign of Terror or the satisfaction of martial ardor. At the

end of the eighteenth century the long and bitterly cruel process of driving the English people from the soil was pretty well completed. The idler landlord and the capitalist farmer had quite displaced the sturdy yeoman of old time. Commons were being daily stolen by individuals, and an increasing portion of the agricultural population now reduced to mere wage-earners to the farmers, were driven into the towns, where they became mere wage-earners to the factory lords and shop keepers. The increasing power of steam, together with the terrible laws favoring long hours and prohibiting combination among workpeople, handed over the population of the cities bound hand and foot to their masters—the sole owners of the means of production. The furious destruction of machinery, which frequently took place; the long, violent struggle against the masters for shorter hours, for restriction of child and woman labor; the persistent endeavors of the workers, as a class, to obtain some little freedom,—all show how fearful the pressure must have been. Readers of Robert Owen and William Cobbett can form some idea of the horrors wreaked on helpless women and children, of the infamous tyranny practised upon almost equally helpless men by the factory owners and their managers. The reports of the various commissions give a still more fearful picture of what went on. So grave was the deterioration of the physique of the poorer classes in the rapidly growing manufacturing districts, that positively a social collapse threatened from this cause alone.

Meanwhile, the whole system of which this was a development grew apace. Education there was little or none; justice as between employed and employer was not to be had. The workers were trampled under foot to a degree which the slave class even in ancient Rome never suffered from. In 1825 came the first of the great industrial crises which can be directly traced to our present system of production, and the



misery among the poor in town and country alike was deplorable. Fifty years ago affairs seemed really hopeless. Men who still remember the situation in the years immediately preceding the Reform Bill of 1832, say that there seemed little prospect of the slightest modification. The aristocracy—though their power had been shaken by the middle class—still held, to all appearance, effective control. What with rotten boroughs, sinecures, and bribery, they could still do pretty much as they pleased. That very manufacturing prosperity which had enabled the capitalist class to amass wealth directly, also enriched the landlords in the shape of enhanced rents indirectly, and thus increased their political strength. England was already established as the manufacturing power of the world, and the one idea of the classes which controlled its development was that the labourers who made for them all this wealth had really no rights at all. But for the activity of Robert Owen, Richard Sadler, Lord Shaftesbury, and a few other self-sacrificing men, even the first factory acts, which in some degree checked the hideous crushing down of the people, might have been delayed for years.

Thus, from the very time when some hope of real reform had dawned on the minds of Englishmen up to the miserably ineffective measure of 1832—a period of fifty years—a relentless social pressure was going on in the cities and in the country, which helped the partisans of reaction to an extent that can hardly be estimated.

England, too, we must never forget, lies outside the great European currents of popular excitement. The days of July in Paris (1830) which produced so great an effect elsewhere, were barely felt here at all. Still the economical conditions of the workers were such, and the political disfranchisement of the masses was so galling, that it was clear even then that some attempt would be made to remedy their position. Men

of our day have grown up into liberty, and forget how hard their fathers had to fight to maintain freedom of the press, right of public meeting, and the like. The Chartist movement, which began a few years after 1832, renewed in politics the Duke of Richmond's electoral plan of more than sixty years before—see how slow it goes!—the basis of the programme being manhood suffrage, annual parliaments, equal electoral districts, and the ballot. But below this the leaders had hope of real social reforms. Fine fellows, indeed, those leaders were. Some of them are living now, and known to me, and I do think nobler men with higher ideals have rarely come to the front in English politics. The spirit of the people was once again rising. That wave of revolutionary movement which at times seems to spread, no man knows how, from country to country, had begun to swell. The anti-corn law agitation, which went on at the same time, though kept up chiefly in the interest of the capitalist class, served to bring the miseries of their social condition clearly before the mass of the workers. Such men as Bronterre O'Brien, Feargus O'Connor, Ernest Jones, or Thomas Cooper—to speak only of the dead—hoped for a sudden and beneficial change for the mass of their countrymen. Foreign revolutionists who were driven here just prior to '48, fully believed that in this country, at least, with its great factories and impoverished workpeople, its great landlords and miserable agricultural laborers, its political freedom and general disfranchisement,—that here, here in England, the social revolution would now surely begin, and the proletariat would at length come by their own. Alas! prison, disillusion and death awaited the English leaders; and their foreign coadjutors, worn out with waiting, still watch sadly but almost hopelessly for the dawning of the day.

That nationalization of the land, which is now so eagerly debated alike in the East and in the West, was a portion of

their creed, and though the true economical explanation of the industrial phenomena by which they were surrounded was not clear to them, most of the English leaders certainly wished to carry out a far more thorough programme than they could induce their middle-class supporters to adopt. But the movement of 1848 failed, partly because the leaders did not know their own minds at the critical moment, but chiefly because the people were not ready for the change, and the social evolution had not—has it yet?—worked itself up to the needful point. Yet the men who wished for an immediate recognition might be pardoned for thinking, in the years just preceding the shake of '48, that a complete change could not long be postponed. Ireland was on the eve of that fearful famine which ended in the death or expatriation of more than a third of her population; England was approaching a period of serious depression, which could not, to all appearance, lead to any improvement for the mass of the people; all over Europe, as well as in the British Isles, men had begun to say that anarchy could not be worse than the existing social oppression. No wonder that, in England in particular, the well-to-do classes drew together in anticipation of grave trouble, and wild schemes of taking hostages of the daughters of the wealthy were discussed on the other side. But suddenly the sky cleared. Emigration to America and Australia offered an outlet to the more ardent spirits, of which they were not slow to avail themselves. The Cromwells and Hampdens of the movement gladly took refuge beyond sea, and expended their energy in new countries. At the same time, the gold discoveries and improved communication gave a marvellous impulse to trade in every direction. Those who left became comfortable and wealthy; those who remained had at least enough to live upon. And so the revolutionary wave of '48, like that of '89, passed by our shores, causing but the slightest



disturbance, and the mass of the people were left still in "that state of life" in which it pleased their "betters" to keep them.

From that time forward, though political agitation has been almost at a standstill—for what, after all, was the reform movement of 1866, or, for that matter, the household suffrage it led up to?—our development in other directions has proceeded with a rapidity altogether unprecedented in human history. Railways, telegraphs, ocean steamers, submarine cables, have brought the peoples of the world together, and have enhanced the wealth-producing capacity of our species to an extent the wisest could not have foreseen as being possible within so short a period. Those sciolists who attribute the vast enrichment of England to free trade overlook the fact that the mastery of man over nature has increased in an almost immeasurable ratio during the last five and thirty years. We English, very lightly handicapped in the race, with our cheap coal, with our densely crowded cities and socialized workshops, with the first-fruits of mechanical invention, with accumulated capital at our command, had the heels of the rest of the world from the start. During the whole of this period, from 1848 to 1878, we had almost undisputed control of the markets of the globe. Our commercial and industrial centres, London, Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Sheffield, Leeds, Birmingham, Bradford, Newcastle, not to mention such places as Middlesboro' or Barrow, have increased in population to an extent scarcely to be surpassed even in America. Our agricultural population has meantime decreased most seriously, and mere lounge towns such as Brighton, Cheltenham, Scarborough, Eastbourne, etc., have sprung up to afford resting-places for the growing number of the indolent wealthy. Nevertheless it is clear to all that the leaps and bounds of commerce, on which our middle-class financiers are never

weary of congratulating us, have given far more wealth to the upper classes than comfort or well-being to the lower; that riches are rolling into the lap of the few, while the many suffer hideously from recurrent depressions, which sweep away every vestige of their prosperity; that unrestricted competition simply degenerates into combination and rigid monopoly, and that the beautiful theory of supply and demand, as applied to the working-classes of Great Britain, produces a state of things so deplorable that philanthropists wring their hands in despair, and even the economist hacks, whose business it is to chant the praises of my Lord Capital and all his works, are sometimes startled into denouncing the very system they champion.

For here in brief is our present position :

*First.* In no civilized country in the world is there such a monopoly of the land as in Great Britain.

*Second.* In no country are capital, machinery, and credit so concentrated in the hands of a class.

*Third.* In no country is there such a complete social separation between classes.\*

\* This is apparent to the most superficial observer. But it is amusing to note that Englishmen of the upper classes are often ignorant that so it is. Thus a well-known Anglo-Indian official of a radical turn said not long ago, speaking of Indian legislation: "Legislation in India is, of course, so much more difficult than in England. In England, you know, if you want to learn exactly what a body of men want, you just ask some of their principal people to dinner and discuss the business quietly. But in India that sort of social gathering is almost impossible, or quite useless." Now, I'll be bound to say, that worthy gentleman does not number among his intimate acquaintance a single individual who works daily at his trade, let alone asking him to dinner. Yet our modern jurist would legislate for him and his, with the profound conviction that the right thing had been done. Probably the idea of what the men wanted would be filtered through an employer; and *he*, doubtless, would dine.

Not long ago a great capitalist—a member of the present Liberal Government—gave an entertainment to the representatives of the working-men's clubs of London at the South Kensington Museum. It was all very nice, I'm told, but the tone of the *fête* was pretty much

*Fourth.* In no country is the contrast between the excessive wealth of the few and the grinding poverty of the many so striking.

*Fifth.* In no country is the machinery of government so entirely in the hands of the non-producing classes, or are the people so cajoled out of voting power and due representation.

*Sixth.* In no country are the people so dependent for their necessary food on sources of supply thousands of miles away.

*Seventh.* In no country is it so difficult for a man to rise out of the wage-earning class.

*Eighth.* In no country in the world is justice so dear, or its administration so completely in the hands of the governing classes who make the laws.

A few figures will bring out some of these points into high relief.

Thus, with regard to the land: according even to the statistics in the so-called "New Domesday Book," a compilation published expressly in the interests of the landlords, 2,192 persons hold 38,726,849 acres of the total small area of Great Britain and Ireland, the people having been completely driven from the soil. Mr. Bright's statement that 30,000 people hold the agricultural land of Great Britain is positively very near the truth. Reckoning rents, royalties and ground-rents, it is calculated that landowners take not less than £100,000,000 out of their countrymen owing to the monopoly they enjoy. Much of this vast revenue is, no doubt, heavily encumbered by debts to the capitalists. This, however, makes it no better, but rather worse, seeing that the mortgages cripple the posses-

the same as it must have been at a gathering called by a feudal lord of old time, when he condescended to regale his retainers with a roasted ox and "fixings." Not a single middle class or upper class man was asked. Of course I am not saying that the working-classes are not as much to blame for this state of things as those who patronise them. I think they are. No one will give them the social equality they have a right to unless they claim it,—of that we may all be very sure.



sor and prevent him from making improvements; while there is no personal relation whatever between the mortgagee and the tenants or laborers on the mortgaged estate. Bad seasons and American competition have, it is reckoned, reduced the value of land in England in many districts not less than twenty-five per cent. The percentage of bankruptcies and the registration of bills of sale among farmers have of late years been something distressing, and as it is impossible to grind the agricultural laborer down any lower—his average wages are but three dollars a week, and farmers charge him at the rate of eight pounds to twenty pounds an acre if he wants a plot of the land, which is let by the landlord to the farmer at £1 or £1 10s.—and the farmers can't continue to pay rent out of capital, a great change must be close at hand. Agriculture is still by far our most important industry, involving the employment of more capital and labour than any other. The value of agricultural produce alone is taken at three hundred million pounds a year on the average. A few years ago Mr. Caird put the landlords' agricultural rents at sixty-seven million pounds. A system like the present, which has no elasticity whatever, and acts as a positive injury to the community, cannot possibly last much longer. When reforms begin they will not stop short of the point which takes in the agricultural laborers.

Who can wonder that, as it is, we are so dependent on foreign countries for an ever-increasing amount of food. Leaving Ireland aside, the population of England, Wales and Scotland in 1840 was, in round figures, 18,000,000, or rather over. In 1882 it was 12,000,000 more, or 30,000,000. During that period agricultural science has greatly advanced, and machinery, improved communications and the like have increased the area of profitable cultivation. In 1840, however, we imported a total amount of £27,000,000 worth of food;

in 1882 we imported no less than £160,000,000, and this amount is steadily increasing. Yet it is the opinion of such experts as Mr. Lawes, Mr. Caird, Lord Leicester, and others that, under proper arrangements, at least twice the amount of food might be profitably grown in Great Britain than is now raised, and our enormous importation reduced to that extent. The grave danger of the dependence upon sea-borne food, which might be cut off during war with any naval power, it is needless to insist upon. Enough that from this point of view also the land question demands immediate consideration.

But again, to show the operation of capital and its absorption of the general wealth. In 1841 the wealth produced in Great Britain has been taken at £514,000,000; at present the annual wealth produced can scarcely be less £1,300,000,000. The working-classes, however, who produce this, take a very small share of it in return for their labor. The actual number of workers cannot be put at more than eight millions—though this is a difficult figure to get at—and the power they exert has been estimated at not less than that of one thousand millions of men. Yet the average wages of the working-classes certainly do not exceed fifteen shillings a week, and the total amount paid to them would not be more than three hundred million pounds, as against more than nine hundred million pounds absorbed by the upper, professional, and middle classes, in one shape or another. The last census shows, too, that while the producing class is not increasing so rapidly in proportion as the non-producing classes, including domestic servants, the actual pauper class is not decreasing. Mr. Russel Wallace even estimates those who are more or less dependent on charity in England and Wales alone at 4,500,000, out of our total population of 28,000,000.

Nor is there any possibility that under existing conditions this state of things will be altered. The tendency of improved

machinery, used, not in the interest of the people at large, or under their control, but simply to enable manufacturers to undersell their neighbors and produce cheaply, is to create a "fringe of labor" always hanging on the skirts of the market ready to be absorbed in periods of "good trade," only to be thrown out again when the inevitable glut and stagnation follow. As to getting out of the wage-earning class, that, as a rule, is hopeless, and even if one fortunate artisan does raise himself, he but shoves a more needy man into his place. Since the beginning of this century there have been also seven industrial crises, and the crushing effect of those upon the rank and file of laborers, as well as upon the small shopkeepers who live upon selling them necessities and trifling luxuries in small quantities, can only be known by those who have seen the houses of the poor sold up and whole families driven on to the "parish" from no fault whatever of their own. Yet here in England, drawing wealth from all parts of the earth, no effort whatever is made to distribute this wealth more fairly among the people. The luxurious classes are quite content to see their taxable profits alone rated at nearly six hundred million pounds, while below men are glad to work for seventy-five cents a day, and cases of sheer starvation are common.

Once more as regards politics. That the House of Lords is a house of landlords is a trite saying; but it is worse, for many of their "lordships" are landlords and capitalists at the same time; and they, consequently, no longer, as in former times, exercise any control over the capitalist class. Look, however, at the composition of the House of Commons, elected, as I have already said, by a minority of the adult male population, and so arranged that no poor man can possibly sit in it without help from others. The interests of the aristocracy are represented there by 165 members; there



are no fewer than 191 land-owners; bankers, traders, lawyers, manufacturers, brewers, etc., sum up to 285. Out of a house of 658 members in all, but two members belong to the working-class—a halfpenny-worth of bread, indeed, to this intolerable deal of sack.

Now here, surely, is the making altogether of a very pretty overturn if once the working-classes understand their position. There can be no mistake whatever about that. Nevertheless, the external aspect of affairs for the moment is tranquil in the extreme. Never were the people, to all appearance, so dull. Our agitators say that men have not half the spirit of the workers of twenty years ago, to say nothing of the Chartists of '48. This is, to a great extent, true, and the reasons for it are not far to seek.

In the first place, the capitalists are more than ever masters of the situation. Almost the whole press and literature of the country are devoted to their cause. The workers fancy they are free, and for the most part are quite ignorant of the fact that the wealth they see around them grows out of their poorly paid labor. Though they can, as a body, *feel* the iron law of wages, though they feel the effects of this law in overwork and short food, they still take it all for granted, and think—those that do think—that chance, or good times, or perhaps strikes, may improve their condition.\* Of the abso-

\* It is from this iron law of wages that Marx has formulated his famous demonstration of surplus value. A man accepts from sheer necessity the competition wages of his time, and sells his force of labor to the capitalist for the week or the day. But in two or three hours' work—Mr. W. Hoyle says, on the average, one and one-quarter hours' work—he will produce quite enough social labor-value to keep him or to refund the wages the capitalist pays him at the end of the week or day out of the results of his toil. The laborer, however, does not work these two or three hours a day only, he works ten, twelve, fourteen, even sixteen, hours a day; for he has sold his labor-force to the capitalist, who can "exploit" it to any extent. Those extra hours of toil, therefore, over and above the time needed to

lute necessity for general social and political combination to bring about genuine reforms, they know at present almost nothing. Moreover, above this rank and file of laborers there stands the aristocracy of labor—the trade-unions, who, though they have done admirable work in the past, now block the path of radical reform. As an old trade-unionist said of them the other day, they are a standing protest against the tyranny of capital, without the slightest idea of progress. Their leaders, too, are almost without exception, more or less in the pay of the capitalists—mostly Liberals who, in effect, use them to keep back their fellows. This game has been played for years. If a working-man shows himself capable, he is flattered; and, so far as anything in the shape of real revolutionary work goes, “squared.”\* It is amusing to see members of the Trade-Union Parliamentary Committee button-holing members in that least democratic of all gathering-places, the lobby of the House of Commons, bowing and scraping, indeed, when, if

create the amount of value represented by the wages paid simply constitute so much unpaid labor which the capitalist takes in the shape of the surplus value created by the laborer—the articles of utility, namely, on which he has been employed. That surplus value the actual capitalist divides up with landlords, bankers, profit-mongers, and other gentlemen at large. When a workman first thoroughly grasps this nice little jugglery which is going on at his expense he is apt to get a trifle warm in the expression of his love for the capitalist and “society” in general. How odd!

\* The trade-unionists are a small fraction of the workpeople of England, yet they constantly pose as if they represented the whole body. There could be no greater absurdity. They are not even agreed among themselves on any matter of moment; and are, in truth, to-day a convention or rather a reactionary body full of the “fads” about limitation of apprentices and the like, though meanwhile machinery is practically abolishing the skilful handicraftsman. The plan pursued by the capitalists has been very astute. They have found money for working-class movements just enough to carry them to the point where danger might begin. Then the support has been withdrawn. This system of pauper politics has debauched many a promising working-class leader.

the workers knew their real position, they would talk as masters. But this sort of thing will not go on for ever. Economical pressure is becoming too strong. We are no longer absolute masters of the markets of the world; the depression in agriculture seriously affects the home trade; business is dull, even in the height of summer weather, and the next industrial crisis may absolutely force the working-classes to sink their petty jealousies, and the trade-unions their fancied superiority, in a more thorough movement than any yet contemplated. Meanwhile there are not wanting signs that another serious revolutionary agitation has begun. All through London political clubs are being formed, at which social changes of the most complete character are warmly discussed. The same in the provinces. Everywhere the claims of labor to control production are being debated by knots of workmen; and invariably, so far as my experience has gone, from the socialist point of view. I do not say that there are many who are yet prepared to take action—there are not; but the number of workers who are taking the trouble to consider is increasing with surprising rapidity. For instance, little more than two years ago a few Englishmen and women, mostly of the working-class, started the organization known as the Democratic Federation. The programme includes the fullest possible representation of the people, and claims for them full power over every department of the State. Among its other aims are to obtain free justice, nationalization of the land, and eventually the control of the machinery of production by the working-class. Already we have held some of the largest open-air meetings ever held in London, and have been almost equally successful in the industrial centres of the country. This shows in itself that the political and social stagnation is rather apparent than real;



that much is going on of which no account is taken by those who wish not to see.\*

More obvious tokens of coming change, however, are not wanting. The House of Commons, which has for three centuries exercised such preponderant influence in the State, is falling into universal discredit. This is by no means wholly due to the strain which has been put upon all its traditions of free speech by the determination of a Liberal government to introduce undisguised despotism in Ireland against the protests of the representatives of the overwhelming majority of Irishmen. The deterioration had begun before.† First of all, the House, which should represent the nation, became merely the scene of party fights and faction squabbles, and then it has degenerated into little better than a machine for registering the decrees of the cabinet—a body, be it remembered, quite unknown to our constitution. Even worse than this are the long, almost interminable utterances of wearisome members on matters of no moment. Let a local question be once started, and all the bores in the House are immediately in full cry. They are sure to know all about it—it is so unim-

\* The following is the programme of the Democratic Federation, as revised and sanctioned at the last conference: (1) Adult Suffrage; (2) Annual Parliaments; (3) Proportional Representation; (4) Payment of Members, and of all election expenses out of rates; (5) Bribery, treating, and corrupt practices at elections to be made acts of felony; (6) Abolition of the House of Lords and of all hereditary authorities; (7) Legislative Independence for Ireland; (8) National and Federal Parliaments, including Representation of Colonies and Dependencies; (9) Nationalization of the land; (10) Disestablishment and disendowment of all State Churches; (11) Free Justice; (12) The Right of Making Treaties, of Declaring War, or Concluding Peace to be vested in the direct representatives of the people.

† This point was admirably put the other day in the "Newcastle Chronicle." This journal belongs to Mr. Joseph Cowen, member for Newcastle-on-Tyne, and is almost the only newspaper in the kingdom which treats politics and social questions from an independent democratic point of view.

portant. But still more depressing is the dead level of mediocrity among the younger men on both sides of the House of Commons. The traditions of oratory seem to have faded out from among them, and men look blankly around to see which of the industrious and painstaking gentlemen now posing as budding statesmen may artfully conceal under his apparent dullness the qualities requisite for leadership in these stirring times.\* Formerly it was not so. Gladstone, Cornwall Lewis, Bright, Hartington, even Forster, Disraeli, Lord Robert Cecil, Gathorne Hardy, had early given evidence of powers which could fire a democracy or influence a senate. What man is there among the English members under forty or five-and-forty—which is it of the landlordlings or conservative money-bags on the one side, or the plutocrats, prigs, and professors on the other, of whom the like could with truth be said? The fact is, landlords and capitalists are alike played out. Their very finance is stuck in a blind-alley. They neither of them have a policy they can affect to believe in for themselves or with which they can hope to stir the pulses of the people. In a word, the House of Commons, as at present constituted, is little more than a middle-class debating club, with a party wire-puller in the speaker's chair. To revive the memory of its ancient glories it must far more directly represent the hopes and fears, aspirations and grievances of the great body of Englishmen, must gain strength and vigour in the free, bluff air of democratic agitation, and trust in the future to the mass of the people for support.

\* I but repeat here what is common talk among political people. It is not that clever young men in other respects are wanting among the members. Some can write and lecture very well. What is lacking is that indescribable energy, independence, imagination, eloquence—that genuine political capacity, in short, which pushes a man to the front almost in spite of himself. How is it the Irish members stand out from the ruck? Surely because they have a cause which they believe in, and have a people at their back.

Meanwhile the very discredit of the pseudo-popular chamber prepares the way for root-and-branch reform. Gladstone, who is denounced as a revolutionary agitator, is really the last of the great middle-class transitionists, and with his disappearance a new era will begin. An agitation for the abolition of the House of Commons would even now find adherents. A little more, and the idea of a hundred years ago will spring again, and a National Convention may force its way to the front. We have outgrown our political swaddling-clothes, and in any case constitutional forms are but the outcome of the social and economical structure beneath them. As that changes, so must they.

This decadence of Parliament is of course only a symptom. But outside, also, straws show which way the current is setting. Apparent stagnation, general mediocrity, almost universal listlessness in grave concerns, indifference to anything but the superficial aspects of events—these precede almost every great upheaval which the world has seen. To take an example of indifference. Among the ugliest growths of modern society are the numerous gangs of organized roughs—answering to the hoodlums of America or the larrikins of Australia—who parade our great cities, and too often, not content with mauling one another, maltreat the peaceful wayfarer. Yet in all the criticisms of the anonymous press on their action, not one writer has taken the trouble to analyze the manner in which these people were fostered into their present brutality. Again, of late there has been a surprising increase of vagrants and loafers—many of them, by the way, are trained militiamen or discharged short-service regulars, who would be ugly fellows in a street fight with their discipline and desperation—men who already render the highways by no means pleasant traveling for foot-passengers. In some districts tramps of this kind have increased ten-fold in number during the last few years.



Here, one would think, was a social phenomenon calling for careful attention. Why are able-bodied men and women thus roaming the country? What are the causes which render them homeless, forlorn, and therefore dangerous? A bill for their repression was lately brought in by Mr. Pell, a Conservative, and Professor Bryce, member for the Tower Hamlets, and a "Philosophical" Radical. Neither professor, nor scholar, nor any other human being in the House of Commons, considered the question from the point of view that society might be to blame. In the House of Lords, when the bill went there, my Lord Salisbury and my Lord Fortescue said matters were getting serious, and such ruffians ought all to be put under prison regimen. First drive men to want and misery by social injustice, and then punish them because, poor devils, they roam the country in search of food. Bravo, my Lords and gentlemen, the bloody legislation of Queen Elizabeth against "the sturdy beggars" will soon be revived at this rate.

Once more. Here in London the number of the unemployed has swollen to almost an alarming extent, even during the summer months. Idle, good-for-nothing, drunken fellows, said the capitalist press; let them starve or go to the workhouse. A friend of mine, a journalist of ability, was shocked at what he saw, and took up the question. He soon found that the great majority of these thousands of workless people were neither idle, good-for-nothing, nor drunken. But the case of most of them seemed to him desperate. Ready to do almost anything, there was literally no work for them to do. My friend sent a note of his inquiries to a well-known journal. "It was better," so wrote the manager in reply, "not to call attention to such matters. It could do no good." Thus the easy classes are shut out from even knowing what misery

there is below them—which any overturn can only improve—while what may be the result of such neglect in a troubled time no one stops to consider for a moment. A few other instances, and I have done. What is called the “sweating” system is increasing in every direction, with the result that young women actually work fourteen hours a day, for six days in the week, for four shillings a week, out of which they have to find house-rent and food! Several cases of this awful slavery have lately figured in the police courts. On the railways and elsewhere the tendency is to increase both length of the hours and intensity of labour to a point which means continuous exhaustion and early death—the death-rate of the working-classes is in itself a lesson when placed by the side of that of the well-to-do. Lastly, the increase of prostitution, especially of very young women and children, of late years, is alone enough to show the utter rottenness of our society. And yet, I repeat, all this passes almost without notice. Our statesmen and economists, our journalists and philanthropists, our politicians and jurists cannot but know these things in a sort of way; but, as to attempting to correct them, that is quite another affair.\*

Now, let any intelligent man—he can find similar things, or not very different probably, within a stone’s throw of him at home—come with me into some of the dwellings of the poor. Here, for instance, is a hard-working family living in a single room: they can afford no more. Father and mother, two daughters, almost grown up, two boys and a little girl, pig together in it as best they may. The court is crowded, the

\* The increase of luxury among the upper and middle classes is positively amazing. Only the other day I went straight from a working-man’s work-room to the Harrow and Eton match. Is it within the bounds of possibility, I said to myself, that, with the schoolmaster fairly abroad, this awful contrast between the waste of the few and the pinching of the many can long continue?

dwelling insanitary, the air unwholesome. Yet the two boys and the girl go to the board school for "education," and return with just enough knowledge to enable them to appreciate their social surroundings. They will, at least, be able to read and write, and know what is going on. Are they likely to increase the ranks of "conservative working-men" or to rest content, unless bemused with beer and tobacco, with arrangements which thus brutify them? I judge not. In the agricultural districts, where there is plenty of room, I have seen arrangements quite as bad. Educate children, and then send them back to such conditions as these: is not this to prepare revolution with both hands? Still we hear the old fateful answer, It will last our time. I say it will not.

For, apart from the lectures of which I have spoken, books, pamphlets and fly-leaves are finding their way into work-shop and attic, which deal with the whole social question from the very bottom. Theories drawn from Dr. Karl Marx's great work on Capital, or from the programme of the Social Democrats of Germany and the Collectivists of France, are put forward in a cheap and readable form. Mr. Henry George's work on "Progress and Poverty," also, has already found tens of thousands of working-class readers. Professor Wallace's book on "Land Nationalization" has also been widely read, though neither of these writers at all meets the views of the advanced school on the subject of capital. But pamphlets and leaflets—some of which are written by men actually working at their trade—produce a still greater effect. Our workers have but little time, and too often little taste, for reading. With them, therefore, short, pithy tracts are the ones that tell.\*

\* Those who have read Paul Louis Courier's brilliant "Pamphlet-des Pamphlets" will require no further evidence of the influence which the pamphlet has had on civilized men. Those who have not will thank me for calling their attention to that famous little brochure.



In support of the views I hold as to the approach of a troublous time, it is scarcely necessary that I should refer to the growth of the Salvation Army, though this strange combination of the Convulsionists of the pre-revolutionary epoch in France and the women's whisky war in America is, thoughtfully considered, significant enough. Moreover, in the really serious conflicts which have taken place between processions of these enthusiasts and the roughs, neither the police nor the magistrates have shown much more capacity than they have displayed in dealing with the gangs in London. While the elements of disorder thus gather apace, the controlling power seems smitten with a sort of paralysis. Outbreaks of brutal savagery are thought worthy of far more leniency than a paltry theft by a starving woman. At the opposite pole to the Salvationists stand the Secularists, who are in their way quite as bigoted, while the most improper exclusion of their leader—I had nearly said their pope, for Mr. Bradlaugh brooks no contradiction in his atheistic church, and has long since registered his right to infallibility—from the House of Commons has given them a legitimate grievance to agitate about.

As to the Church of England, she has stood so many shocks and schisms without a topple, that even the growing feeling against all state churches may take some time to upset her. Nevertheless, many of the rising young parsons themselves denounce the alliance which the ecclesiastical hierarchy has made with the mammon of unrighteousness, and proclaim aloud that whatever modern Christianity may find it convenient to allow, the religion of Christ means more or less complete communism. How many of these audacious young men will sink their principles in fat livings and preach general subservience to snoring laborers, I should be sorry to estimate. Enough that the ideas are abroad quite apart from individual backslidings. If religionists of any "stripe" wish to gain a

permanent hold on the workers nowadays, they must combine the prospect of material improvement in this world with the promise of eternal happiness in the next. Otherwise the indifference of the mass will be too much for them, the singular success of the Salvationists notwithstanding.

But some may say, This gloomy picture you paint for us is too much of one colour: is there no ray of light to irradiate the landscape? For the great mass of the working-people of England, under present social conditions, I say deliberately—None. On the contrary, the future seems for them darker than ever. For nowadays we are not as in 1848: the outlets are blocked; industrial crises when they come are universal; capitalism dominates the planet. Electricity, which is already clearly seen to be the great force of the future, and which bears the same relation to steam that steam did to the old horse-power—this illimitable engine of production is also going without heed or protest into the hands of the capitalist class. The anarchy consequent upon the existing system of production and exchange will be only intensified thereby; the “fringe of labor,” the vagrants, the paupers, the residuum, in short, will be increased; the rich will become yet richer; the poor, poorer still. Even as I write the process is going on so plainly that he who runs may read the result written on the faces of the people. As capital rolls up into larger and yet larger masses, the small shop-keeper is crushed out by the coöperative associations and the great magazine stores; huge corporations carry on business without the slightest regard for the human machines they employ. So the wheel revolves, grinding ever smaller the mass of mankind beneath.

Revolution! What have the workers to fear from revolution! Their life is one perpetual Revolution. They are never sure of their home or livelihood from one week to another. It is reckoned that the working-classes of London

all change their homes once in every two and a half years. And these homes, bear in mind, become dearer and worse as times go on. The very improvements in our great cities mean closer crowding and worse accommodation for those who really make the nation's wealth. What have they to fear from a general overturn? Nothing. And ere long they'll know this. "We lived in garrets forty years ago, we live in garrets now," said one of the most active of the old Chartists, who has lived and agitated to the present time. Nor must the fact be overlooked that the great machine industries, so far more developed here than in any other country, though they have been the means of keeping the people down, have also taught them how to combine.

Thus, then, discontent is growing with existing grievances; the same economical pressure which produces the discontent and grievances leads to combination; the present lot of the workers is so bad as a whole that they are beginning to think no change could be for the worse; ideas are gradually spreading among them which would lead them to strive for a complete overthrow; there is no authority above which commands their respect or seriously strives to improve their condition, and the very increase of man's power over nature serves but to render their case worse. The working-classes of England must, in the near future, be either rulers or slaves; and they are slowly, very slowly, learning that the choice rests with them. A serious foreign war would very soon bring the whole to a head; for assuredly the mass of Englishmen would never again submit to heavy sacrifices, which would only benefit the governing classes. Democracies fight, no doubt, but they fight for an idea or for their own hand. That revolutionary current also which is moving below the surface in all European countries can scarcely fail this time to affect us. The impulse will probably come from without; but, unless we were already prepared, it would have little effect. When such ideas are spreading, it needs but a spark to fire the train.



If, however, the country is at present in a bad condition for the many, which all must admit, there is still not wanting evidence that the English people, under better arrangements, would soon rise to the level of the most glorious periods of our past history. Those very lads who now fall into the dangerous classes from sheer ignorance and bad management—there are, according to the police, at least three hundred thousand such people in London alone—form, if taken early and thoroughly fed and trained, the flower of our navy. The race is really as capable as ever. In America, in Australia, all the world over, the Anglo-Saxon blood is still second to none. It is high time, then, that the great body of Englishmen should take up their heritage, that they should make common cause with their Irish brethren, as well in England as in Ireland, in one continuous effort to free the workers of both peoples from class domination and class greed. There is enough and to spare for all. Let, then, the men and women who make the wealth of these islands bid those bunglers who trade upon their welfare stand back; let them trust to themselves alone to hand on a nobler industrial England to their children, sinking all petty jealousies, race hatreds, and personal selfishness in the endeavour to secure health, home comfort, and true freedom for the millions who now have neither happiness nor hope. Then, indeed, that very concentration of population which, under our present system of unrestricted competition results in squalor, degradation, and misery, will be our strength, our safety, and our greatest resource. Then, indeed, England may hold out to all nations an example of social reorganization, which may yet give her an ungrudged supremacy among the peoples of the world. Such an England I for one see before us in the future: to bring about such a reorganization, I, for one, will never cease to strive.