

THE PROGRESS OF SOCIALISM.

WHEN Louis Reybaud—who, it appears, was the inventor of the word “socialism”—wrote his article on Socialists, in the “Dictionnaire de l’Economie Politique,” in 1854, he believed that their unhealthy hallucinations had wholly ceased to exist. “Socialism is dead,” he says; “to speak of it is to pronounce its funeral oration.” This affirmation of Reybaud’s was the general opinion some few years since. Socialism was then studied merely as affording curious examples of the wanderings of the human mind.

At the present day, on the Continent, men have fallen into the opposite extreme. Socialism is said to be everywhere. The red spectre haunts the imagination of all, and it is a very general belief that we are on the eve of a great social cataclysm. Though this may be an exaggeration, it is nevertheless certain that Socialism, in a variety of forms, has spread most extraordinarily of late. In a violent form it has been adopted by town labourers, workmen in factories, &c., and is now spreading to the country. The agrarian movement in Ireland, which is now brewing in other lands, clearly owes to it its origin. In a scientific form it has penetrated into the domain of political economy, and is upheld by professors in nearly all the Universities of Germany and Italy. Under the form of State Socialism it may be found seated in the Cabinets of sovereigns; and under a Christian form it has been accepted by Catholic priests, and, more generally still, by the ministers of different Protestant denominations.

In the debates of the German Parliament, May 23rd, 1878, when a law was proposed by the Government of the Empire against Socialism, the Deputy Joerg, one of the most distinguished orators in Germany, said very rightly that “a movement, almost imperceptible when it commenced, has developed with extraordinary rapidity, and that this

prodigious development can only be accounted for by the many modifications which have crept into economic and social society." He continued: "Modern civilization has its dark side, and that dark side is Socialism, which will not disappear so long as civilization continues to be what it now is. Socialism has not infected Germany only; it has established its headquarters here, and its philosophical and scientific education is pursued chiefly in our land, but it is to be met with everywhere; it is a universal evil." In the last number of the *Revue des deux Mondes*, M. de Mazade calls Socialism the social phylloxera.

England alone seems to be preserved from it; but the extraordinary success of Mr. Henry George's recent publication, "Progress and Poverty"—of which I recently spoke in this Review*—is a clear proof that her immunity is at an end. The *Quarterly Review*, speaking of this work in its last number, says:—

"Mr. George's London publishers have lately reissued his book in an ultra-popular form. It is at this moment selling by thousands in the alleys and back streets of England, and is being welcomed there as a glorious gospel of justice. This alone would suffice to give it a grave importance, but half the story yet remains to be told. It is not the poor, it is not the seditious only, who have been thus affected by Mr. George's doctrines. They have received a welcome which is even more singular amidst certain sections of the really educated classes. They have been gravely listened to by a conclave of English clergymen. Scotch ministers and Nonconformist professors have done more than listen; they have received them with marked approval, they have even held meetings and given lectures to disseminate them. Finally, certain trained economic thinkers, or men who pass for such in at least one of our universities, are reported to have said that they see no means of refuting them, and that they probably mark the beginning of a new political epoch."

What is Socialism? What is the cause of its progress? What are its errors and what its truths? These are the points which I wish now briefly to examine.

To begin: What is Socialism? I never yet met with a clear definition, or even with any precise indication as to the meaning of this word. People are always Socialists of some special type. Since the passing of the agrarian laws for Ireland, Irish Conservatives have considered Mr. Gladstone as a Socialist of the worst description. Prince Bismarck, the friend of Lassalle and Schäffle, and the author of the abominable proposition to create a fund for pensioning invalid workmen by a monopoly of tobacco, cannot but be tinged with dark-red Socialism. The French Ministers, who recently endeavoured to convey all the railways over into the hands of the State, must also be Socialists; and since the publication of Bastiat's famous pamphlet, it is proved beyond a doubt to the satisfaction of every convinced free-trader and orthodox economist that whoever does not admit perfect liberty of commerce, must be a Socialist and a Communist. Proudhon, the author of the well-known sentence, "*Property is theft*," far from

wishing to strengthen the power of the State, sought its abolition under the name of An-Archy. Was he not then a Socialist? After the "Journées de Juin" in 1848, Proudhon said to the magistrate, who questioned him that he went to contemplate "the sublime horrors of the cannonade." "But," says the magistrate, "are you then not a Socialist?" "Certainly I am a Socialist." "What, then, is Socialism?" "Socialism," replies Proudhon, "is any aspiration towards the amelioration of society." "If this be the case then," the magistrate very justly answers, "we are all Socialists." "That is precisely my opinion," adds Proudhon.

Proudhon's definition is too wide; he omits two most important characteristics of Socialism. The first is that the great aim of the system is to equalize social conditions; and the second is that it endeavours to effect this through the medium of the law or the State. The aim of Socialism is equality, and it will not admit that liberty alone could lead to a reign of justice. All reasonable economists recognize the existence of evils and iniquity in society; but they believe that both will diminish from the effects of "natural laws," and as a favourable result of freedom. Christianity condemns riches and inequality with a vehemence nowhere surpassed, but it does not refer us to the State for the establishment of a just administration.

The Socialist is a pessimist. He paints in bold relief the worst side of social conditions, and shows the strong oppressing the weak, the rich crushing the poor, inequality becoming harder and more abominable. He sighs for an ideal in which well-being will be portioned out according to the deserts of each, and as a reward for services rendered.

The Economist is an optimist. He thinks that the man who pursues his personal interest contributes as much as possible to the general interest; and that social order must be the result of free play being allowed to individual selfishness. In his opinion, the only thing therefore to be done is to do away with all obstacles, to reduce to a minimum the power of the State, to govern as little as possible. The world can get on of itself. Socialism takes its stand on justice enforced by law: the Economist counts only on personal interest individually pursued.

As soon as man had attained sufficient culture to become aware of existing social iniquities, and to be capable of raising his ideas to a more perfect order of things, dreams of social reformation must have sprung up in his mind. At all periods and in every country, when primitive equality has disappeared, there have been Socialist aspirations, in the form of protestations against existing evils, or of utopian schemes for the remodelling of the social order. The most perfect of these Utopias was Plato's Republic, that wonderful quintessence of Hellenic Spiritualism applied to the conception of the State. But the most persistent protest against inequality, and the most ardent aspirations for right and justice, that have ever stirred and roused

humanity came from Judea. The world is still alive to this influence, which has continued ever increasing during all these hundreds of years. Job sees evil triumphing and longs for justice; the prophets of Israel revile the iniquity of their age, and announce a new and better order of things; but it was reserved for the Gospel to express these ideas in language so simple and penetrating that it stirs and transforms the hearts of all who hear and understand it. The good tidings are here announced to the poor: "The last shall be first, and the first last;" "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth;" "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God;" "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand;" "This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled." And this transformation ought to take place in this world. All the early Christians believed in the Millennium, and, as a natural consequence of their faith, they established Communism. We all know well the delightful picture traced in the Acts of the Apostles the life in common of the disciples of Jesus at Jerusalem. When the full time had elapsed and it became impossible to look any longer for a Kingdom of Righteousness in this world, the hopes of Christians were turned to the next, to the kingdom of heaven. At all events the thirst for justice and equality displayed by all the prophets and in the Gospel is still to be found in the writings of the Fathers of the Church, who speak in terrible accents. Every time the people take, as it were, the Gospel in hand, and become thus imbued with its teachings, a sort of flame of reform, a levelling influence springs up. When religious sentiment includes a belief in Divine justice and a desire to see that justice carried out here below, then it is quite impossible that equalizing and socialistic aspirations should not spring up along with a strong feeling of condemnation of the present social relations.

The communistic ideas of the Millenarians and of the Cenobites were preached again during the Middle Ages by the Gnostics, by Waldo's disciples, by the Begging Friars, by the Taborites in Bohemia, by the Anabaptists in Germany, and by the Levellers in England.

These notions also led to inspired dreams of a perfect society, as for instance Joachim de Fiore's "Eternal Gospel," More's "Utopia," Campanella's "Civitas Solis," Harrington's "Oceana," and Fénelon's "Salent." As says Dante, St. Francis d'Assisi relieves poverty, which had been wholly abandoned since the days of Christ, and weds himself to it. The convent, from whence the source of all discord, the distinction between mine and thine, is banished, seemed to be the realization of the Christian ideal: *Dulcissima verum possessio communis*. The dream of all enthusiastic religious sects has always been to transform society into a community of brothers and equals.

When ideas such as these gain the suffering populations, they pro-

voke outbreaks and massacres, such as the Jacqueries in France, the insurrection of Wat Tyler in England, and that of John of Leyden in Germany.

Ideas are like *microbi*: they develop when they find a spot which suits them. Socialism has never found soil so well suited to its spread and extension as at the present day. All tends to this end: religious sentiments, political principles, and economic conditions. No one will contest that Christianity preaches the succouring of the poor and the afflicted; and it is as much against the possession of great riches as the most radical Socialist. It is needless to recall here the many instances where this subject is alluded to in Holy Scripture: the words are in the memory of all of us. Even after the Catholic Church had allied herself to absolute monarchy, listen how she still speaks to her members through Bossuet: *—

“‘I came,’ says the Saviour, ‘to preach the Gospel to the poor.’—*Evangelizare pauperibus misit me.* The rich are tolerated if they assist the poor. In the primitive Church everything was in common, so that none should be guilty of leaving another in want. For what injustice, my brethren, that the poor should bear the full burden, that the whole weight of misery should fall on their shoulders! If they complain and murmur against Divine providence—Lord! let me say it—it is not without some appearance of justice; for as we are all made in the same fashion and there is but little difference between mud and mud, why do we see on one side joy, honour, and affluence, and on the other sorrow and despair, excessive want, and often, too, thralldom and contempt? Why should one fortunate mortal live in abundance, able to satisfy his every little useless fancy, while another, every whit his equal, cannot maintain his poor family or even procure for them sufficient food to allay the gnawing pangs of hunger?”

In a sermon on “The Necessities of Life; how to provide for them,” we find again the same idea:—

“The murmurings of the poor are often just. Why should so much inequality exist? All mankind are but of dust, and the only justification of this difference is the admission that God has recommended the poor to the rich, to be relieved by the latter out of their superfluities. *Ut fiat equalitas*, as says St. Paul.”

Bossuet only reproduces what may be read on almost every page of the writings of the Fathers. “The rich are thieves,” says St. Basil. “The rich are brigands,” says St. John Chrysostom; “some sort of equality must be established by their distributing to the poor of their abundance; but it would be preferable if everything were in common.” “Opulence is always the result of a theft; if not committed by the actual possessor, it has been the work of his ancestors,” says St. Jerome; and according to St. Clement, if justice were enforced there would be a general division of property; private possession being an iniquitous thing.

We see, then, that Christianity engraves very deeply in the hearts

* Sermon on “The Dignity of the Church's Poor.”

of all ideas which tend strongly to Socialism. It is quite impossible to read attentively the Old Testament prophecies and the Gospels, and then to cast a glance at the economic conditions of the present day, without being led strongly to condemn the latter, as very contrary to the ideal of Jesus. Every Christian who understands and believes his Master's teaching has some Socialistic tendencies, and every Socialist, great as may be his hatred of all religion, possesses some unconscious Christianity. Darwinists and the economists who believe human society to be governed by natural laws which must be respected are the real opponents of both Socialism and Christianity. According to Darwin, progress is effected among living things because those best adapted to circumstances get the upper hand in the struggle for life. The strongest, the bravest, the best armed triumph, and gradually stamp out the weak and feeble, and thus races become more and more perfect. This natural optimism is also the basis of orthodox political economy. In human society, the great end to be attained is the general welfare, and this is best effected by allowing the laws of Nature to pursue their course, and not by endeavouring to introduce plans of reform invented by men. Leave things alone, let things go as they are; with free and open competition the cleverest and most dexterous will gain the first place, and this should be the desire of all. There is nothing more absurd than to employ misplaced charity to save those who are by nature condemned to disappear. By so doing an obstacle is thrown in the path of progress. Make way for the strong, for Strength is Right.

Christianity and Socialism speak in very different terms from these. They declare war against the strong,—that is to say, the rich,—and they preach the relief of the poor and the afflicted. They subject the pretended natural laws to a law of justice. We are told in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

It is not easy to understand the strange blindness which leads Socialists to adopt Darwinism, which rejects their equalizing claims, and to refuse Christianity, from whence they first sprang, and which, in many instances, justifies them. At all events it may be safely affirmed that the religion under which we have all been trained, both believers and opponents, draws up the principles of Socialism in most concise terms, and that Socialist doctrines have taken the deepest root in Christian countries.

We will now proceed to examine how it was that Socialism quitted the regions of Communistic dreamings and aspirations and became a political party.

It was at the time of the Declaration of Independence in America and of the French Revolution, when the sovereignty of the people and the equality of all men were loudly proclaimed, that the principle of human

fraternity descended from its elevated utopian heights to become the watchword of the Radical party in every land, where the ideas which had triumphed in America and Paris thenceforward took root.

-Equality in political rights leads inevitably to a claim for equality of social conditions; that is to say, the apportioning of well-being according to the work done. Universal suffrage almost demands that every one should be a proprietor. It is a contradiction that the people should be at once sovereign and miserable. As both Aristotle and Montesquieu insist, democratic institutions are based on a supposition of social equality, otherwise the poor elector would naturally vote for an amelioration of his own situation. But now, when equal rights are accorded to all men, the condition of the artisan and labourer is considerably altered; it becomes a dependent position, and loses its secular guarantees: while the working-man is raised in the political order to the dignity of a sovereign, he falls in the economic order to the position of a hireling. This point should be clearly grasped, for it is at the root of all contemporary Socialism.

At the close of the last century a gradual change commenced in the economic conditions of civilized society. The "capitalistic" period began. The ceaseless accumulation of capital increased many-fold the means of production and the quantity of goods produced; but at the same time it enslaved labour. Machinery multiplies its marvels, but it does not belong to the hired workman, who is its slave, instead of being its master. Things were not thus formerly. Thanks to the corporations then established, labour was property. It has now become a merchandise, the price of which rises or falls according to the demand, and which at times finds no purchaser. Wages are often higher than they were formerly, but they are always uncertain. When a stoppage, resulting from a crisis which the workman can neither foresee nor prevent, takes from him all means of subsistence, there is no one to provide for his immediate wants. He is a free agent; he has been paid his wages and must manage as best he can. The condition of the cultivator of the soil, and the portion of the fruit of his labour reserved for himself, was formerly regulated by custom. The terms established for *métayage* farming, the conditions of hereditary leases, &c., were not changed or modified; people lived secure as to the future, their existence was not dependent on the hard laws of competition. At the present day the rent of farms, like wages and salaries, is dependent on the law of demand and supply. It is true that the serf was attached to his glebe; but he had the right to live and die on that piece of land. To-day there is no legal tie between the tenant and the land he cultivates. The owner can turn him out at the expiration of each term of years, and raise his rent at every slight increase in the value of land.

Formerly the Commune was to the cultivator a sort of Providence;

it provided him with timber to prepare and warm his dwelling, with pasture for his cattle, and, not unfrequently, with land to cultivate. Each family, or each little community of families, had allotted to it a portion of the soil, subject, of course, to certain duties. The Commune was something more than a political division of territory; it was an economic institution, and its administration was in the hands of those who constituted it. For the tradesman and the worker, in factories the corporation replaced the Commune. It ensured to him work, a market, and, in fact, existence. The administration of common interests, fêtes, and reunions bound all the workers at one trade in a bond of fellowship. For them also the future was secure. In the city, as in the country, the producer retained the means of production, and labour possessed capital. The modern workman, without a tie binding him to his fellow-man, without land, guarantee, or security, lives from day to day on what capital accords to him: the hireling did not even exist; but to-day this latter category is the type of the chief agent of production—viz., labour.

To be brief: while formerly the condition of those whose arms create riches was assured by custom, it now depends on the fluctuations of the market, on competition, and, in appearance, on the will of proprietors and capitalists. We are living under full liberty of contract; but in every contract he who advances the wherewithal to labour—*i.e.*, land and capital—will fix the terms he chooses, and will, of course, so fix them that the profits will be at a maximum and wages at a minimum. Now that the traditional barriers which custom had established to protect the feeble and afflicted have fallen away, the Darwinian struggle for life is carried on unimpeded in the economic world. The strongest get the upper hand, and, in this case, the strongest are the richest.

If we consider the changes which the progress of industry has effected in economic conditions, we shall see that the same economic influences which tend to equalize men's condition are productive of antagonism between masters and men, and while thus leading to the triumph of democracy they engender Socialism. Look at the woollen industry in England and Flanders, the products of which were exported all over the world, and which was the means of creating in both countries so many populous communities. Certain old manuscripts permit our penetrating into the artisan's dwelling at this period. He is seated plying his trade of weaving cloth; near him, his children prepare the distaff, and his wife spins at the wheel. His work is thus carried on at the domestic hearth. The head of the family labours with his own hands, helped by his wife and children, and sometimes by apprentices. He needed but a small capital. The education, condition, manner of life and thought of the master and his men differed but little. Corporate privileges might produce

discontent, but this could not become class antagonism, because master and men belonged to the same rank. It is true that towards the close of the Middle Ages the progress of riches and inequality led to a struggle between the big and the little, the *fat* and the *thin*, in the Communes of Flanders, and still more in Italy; but this was merely the rivalry of different trade corporations, disputing among themselves for certain political privileges, and not the radical enmity of the capitalist and labourer, nor the claim for equality of social conditions.

At the present day production presents totally different characteristics. The workmen work away from home, and are thus forced to desert their families during the entire day. They are employed all together in immense workrooms, setting in motion enormous masses of machinery, which increase human strength by ten and a hundred-fold. The factory workman, having to accomplish a merely muscular and automatic labour, has fallen below the level of the apprentice of the Middle Ages, while the director in chief of the factory has risen far above the master of the same period. Whether the works belong to him or not, he has a very large capital at his disposal, and a whole army of workmen under his command; he is either rich himself or is in receipt of a very handsome salary; he must be well up in technical knowledge, be possessed of sufficient authority and tact to exact obedience from his subordinates, understand the requirements of foreign countries and the condition of the export market, and follow attentively the fluctuations of the monetary market and commerce, not only in his own immediate neighbourhood, but all over the world; for now all countries are so closely connected by trade, that if a crisis take place in one or the other hemisphere, its effects are universally felt to a greater or less degree. His education, position, manner of life, the necessity even of exercising authority, place the head of a factory in quite another world from that occupied by his workmen. His Christian sentiments may lead him to regard them as brothers, but there can be nothing in common between them; they are strangers one to the other. He may wish to increase their wages, to ameliorate their condition; but in vain, he cannot do so. Competition obliges him, in spite of himself, to reduce as much as possible the cost of production.

The relations which the present industrial organization establishes between the capitalist and the workmen have been very clearly and accurately explained by the well-known engineer, James Nasmyth, in the evidence which he laid before the Committee of Inquiry into Trades Unions. He showed that it was to the interest of industry that many workmen should seek employment, because when that is the case the price of labour, and consequently the cost of production, falls. He added that he had often increased his receipts by replacing

able-bodied men by apprentices. When asked what became of the workmen he turned off, and their families, he replied, "I do not know. I left their fate to the natural laws which govern society." In speaking thus, Nasmyth set forth pure economic doctrines. Christianity, by the mouth of the Comte de Mun and that of the Bishop of Mayence, Von Ketteler, holds very different language. "The principle of leaving things as they are, of not interfering," say these two authorities, "gives anarchical liberty, and ensures the victory to the strong. Freedom of labour is proclaimed as the enfranchisement of the people, and what does it practically lead to? To the servitude of the workers."

Thus as industry on a large scale employs more machinery and divides labour, it betters the condition of the lower orders by offering them manufactured articles at a lower price; but at the same time it increases the distance which separates the capitalist from the workman. Artisans, small contractors, and small tradesmen are completely crushed by these immense manufactories. The lords of finance and industry are the masters of the economic world.

Yet another cause favours the development of Socialism, and this is the instability of all conditions, and the uneasiness and measureless aspirations which are the result of this. This instability is attributable to civil equality and liberty of action. In the Middle Ages every man was tied to his post, but his lot in life was assured. The workman was protected against competition by certain trade privileges. There were neither stoppages nor crises. The customers of labour were well known and invariable. The situation of shopkeepers was as secure as that of the artisans. Generation succeeded generation at the same counter, living as their fathers had done before them. Only the great traders of the Continent—as, for instance, Jacques Cœur, in France, or the Peruzzi, bankers in Italy, who were first the friends and afterwards the unpaid creditors of Edward III. of England—moved in a wider circle, and had more opportunities of making money. Far above all this the feudal nobility lived in a world quite apart and unattainable, protected by their strongholds, by their riches, and by caste prejudices. Society was thus completely enclosed in a complicated web of traditional customs. It was immovable and stable. It was a superstructure of class above class, similar to that which existed for so great a length of time in Egypt, and which left there as here such prodigious monuments. Our mediæval town-halls and cathedrals, imposing in their indestructibility, remind us of the pyramids and temples of the banks of the Nile.

Certainly the material condition of mankind at the present day is preferable. Formerly individual suffering was at times excessive, because the violence and brutality of great lords was not checked by the powerful hand of the State, and because commerce and science were not sufficiently advanced to be able to combat scarcity or sick-

ness. Society was constantly agitated by local wars and decimated periodically either by famine or the plague. But in ordinary times the minds of the people were calm, and in times of trouble they were resigned. All these institutions of the Middle Ages, which were both obstacles and refuges, have been swept away. Liberty and equality, having been proclaimed for all, have levelled the land, on which universal competition is now unchained.

This competition is the cause of all progress ; it is the great force of industrial activity, the source of our power. But it is productive of an endless agitation, of permanent uneasiness, and of general instability. No one is satisfied with his lot, no one feels secure as to his future. The rich burn to acquire greater riches, and he who labours to live fears the loss of his daily bread. Every man is free, and all fulfil their destiny ; there is no class set apart, no inaccessible trade ; equality is legally established, but in point of fact inequality exists, and is the more irritating because every man may aspire to all. There are more bitter awakenings, as more lofty dreams are indulged in. All may climb to the highest step on the ladder, but few reach it ; and those who remain below curse those who are above them, while coveting their place.

Men formerly were not worried by the wish for change, because they saw no means of getting it. They were possessed of no ambition to change their state, nor of any thirst for riches ; for all this was beyond their reach. Their lot in this world was fixed, and their hopes were for the next. Now they desire happiness for this present life, and aim at destroying all that may prove an obstacle to the equal distribution of earthly joys. We must not forget that there are many reasons why men of the present day should pursue wealth with much greater ardour than formerly. In the first place, it can procure them many more enjoyments than at the period we speak of : home comforts and luxuries of every kind, the pleasure of travelling all over the world, summers passed in charming alpine resorts, and winters on the enchanting coasts of the Mediterranean—all this has replaced the monotonous existence of the feudal baron, who could only spend his superfluous revenues in entertaining his subordinates. At the present time the old feeling of good-will between masters and servants, landlords and their tenants, has wholly disappeared. The proprietor and capitalist now look only to the increase of their revenue, and in this they conform to the principle of orthodox political economy, for the greater greed with which riches are individually pursued must result in the rapid spread of general wealth. On the other hand, tenants and workmen of all classes are becoming daily more convinced of the truth of the terrible adage, "Our master is our enemy." The class-struggle which has broken out in Ireland in all its horror is at present an exception ; but the

sentiments which gave it birth are to be found fermenting in the breasts of nearly every rural population. In the country villages of Russia, Germany, Spain, Austria, and Italy are to be heard only words of sorrow, hatred, and revolt.

Landed property has acquired a character hitherto quite unprecedented in history. In primitive ages, land was the collective property of the tribe, and afforded each family the means of subsistence by working to cultivate it. In feudal times it was awarded to different functionaries as a reward for services, military, legal, and otherwise. At the present day, freed from every tie and every duty, it is a mere source of enjoyment to its possessor. The working classes and the owners of the soil become thus more and more estranged, and here, as in Rome, estrangement and hostility (*hostis*) are synonymous words.

It is the wages question that gives so acute and inflammatory a character to the Socialism of to-day. Formerly wages were regulated by custom, and, frequently, by an official tariff. Now they are fixed by free competition—that is to say, by the ratio existing between the number of hands and the amount of capital seeking employment. All must be subjected to Ricardo's famous law—to the "brazen law," as it is called by German Socialists—by virtue of which wages must be fatally reduced to what is strictly necessary for a workman to be able to live. When labourers began to understand this law, formulated by economists, they said: "As our pay depends on the number of hands offered, let us cease to offer them, unless we are paid more." Hence these strikes on the Continent, in America, and in England especially, which almost daily stop work or impede trade. There is a state of war permanently going on between masters and men, with all its miseries, its victories, and its defeats,—a civil war, stifled and bitter, where he who can the longest subsist without earnings is the victor,—a struggle far sharper and more cruel than any waged with cannons and rifles: furniture is pawned or sold, the small savings of better days gradually disappear, and finally misery and hunger besiege the domestic hearth, till wives and children cry for mercy.

Free trade between country and country, added to free competition in each country, led to the formation of the International League of labourers. In spite of the rivalries of dynasties and races, the relations existing between civilized countries have become so intimate, that everything partakes, more or less, of an international character. We have international exhibitions, international congresses, international institutes, international railway fares, international telegraph companies, international banks, international regattas, the universal postal union, the monetary union. The entire world is one vast workshop, one enormous market. The result is that the heads of an industry in any country could not possibly raise the wages of workmen, even did they feel so disposed, for they would increase the cost

of production of their goods, and would risk losing their customers, who would go to a foreign market. A local strike also generally ruins the industry in which it has triumphed.

Workmen understood this point, and drew the conclusion that the only way to obtain a rise in the rate of wages was to form an International League, to be joined by all the workers of the same trade in every country, so that, if need be, a universal strike might be declared. By this means an increase in wages became possible, for there would no longer be the fear of a local strike failing through foreign competition.

This league, which has ceased to exist as a regular organization, still possesses devoted and fanatical apostles, who spread its principles; and it is, thanks to their teaching, which is now open and now occult, that Socialism is at the present moment to be found in every country. It passes frontiers, bringing forgetfulness of all hostilities of race, and completely effaces patriotism. Compatriots are enemies, if they be industrial heads; foreigners are brothers, if they live by what they earn. As soon as the Republic was proclaimed in France the German Socialists held meetings and pronounced against the German army; while the workmen of London, Pesth, Vienna, and Berlin applauded the struggles and excused all the crimes of the Commune in Paris. The economic situation being very similar in all countries, Socialism finds everywhere the same grievances, the same hopes, the same inflammatory elements. Social aspirations are not local, like political revolutions. They are universal, like religious revivals, because they appeal to wants everywhere experienced, and to longings which, though may be dormant, are in nearly every human breast. Like religion, Socialism inspires the desire to proselytize, and has its apostles, who are full of a fanaticism now wild and savage and now mystical. The fierce hatred which set fire to the four quarters of Paris and raised the cry, "May all buildings which recall inequality perish in the flames!" is not dead; it still slumbers. But for how long?

In short, the situation that economic progress has created for modern society may be thus briefly summed up. It has freed workmen from all shackles, and has withdrawn them from the grasp of the corporation; it has increased their wages and their well-being, but it has also formed them into a distinct and separate body; grouping them in masses, in vast workshops and factories, in certain great centres; it has given them fresh wants and requirements, and above all it has awakened in them unlimited aspirations, and has exposed them, utterly defenceless, to all the fluctuations of business, so often severely shaken by changes in industry, by commercial crises, and by stagnation in sales. The peasant is freed from compulsory labour and from glebes, and his condition is certainly improved; but he is in constant dread of an increased rental, and this dread produces a feeling of enmity between landlords

and their tenants. When agricultural labourers and small farmers have learnt, like town workmen, to envy the lot of the rich, while they curse their own, the danger which threatens democratic society will become apparent.

This danger may be explained in two words: You grant a power to elect legislators, and therefore to legislate, to men who own no property, and whose wages are fatally reduced to what is strictly necessary; you proclaim equality of rights, while the actual inequality which still exists causes far greater suffering and is more irritating to bear. De Tocqueville, the most far-seeing of democratic theorists, when studying the subject in the United States, did not perceive this danger, which at the time, indeed, did not exist; but we may remember Macaulay's letter, which announced the arrival of a ravager more terrible than the Huns and the Vandals, which the nations themselves should have given birth to, the issue, indeed, of their own institutions. We may now truly say that this was a real prophecy.

“Liberty of examination, which calls everything into question, impatience against, and contempt for, all authority, and the overthrow of religious belief, have embittered the conflict and destroyed all that might have tended to modify it. Curbed beneath a secular yoke, workmen formerly believed themselves created to support the great by their labour. But the French Revolution came, and called to them, “Arise, you are your master's equals!” and soon the question was mooted—Why this iniquitous division? Why should the idle live in opulence while the workers have nothing? Christianity, which brought notions of equality and fraternity to the Western World, at the same time taught submission and patience, for it tells the oppressed that this life is merely a term of probation: obey the powers that be, bear uncomplainingly all privations and troubles, for it will all be counted to you in the world to come, where your true treasure exists: iniquity triumphs here, but the Kingdom of Heaven is the inheritance in store for the disinherited of this world. While the Gospel thus awakens the soul to a sense of justice, sowing, too, the seed of social revolution, it averts the explosion by showing to the oppressed a perspective of endless felicity beyond the grave. At the present day, as faith disappears and people cease to believe in a heavenly compensation, they claim their share of happiness on this earth. They will have the promises realized in this world, instead of waiting for their realization in Paradise. If the unbelieving Socialist fail to receive his deserts, if he be miserable, he cannot console himself by the reflection that his sufferings, borne with resignation, will be repaid him a hundred-fold. If you attempt to prove to him that the justice he dreams of is a mere chimera, that the present division of wealth has been fixed by natural laws which cannot be upset, then in despair he cries, “May fire burn up this society, where iniquity reigns, that a new world may be raised on its ruins.”

Nihilism will then be spread abroad. Those who propagate revolutionary doctrines try so hard to eradicate all religious belief because they feel that the best way to bring the people to revolt is to take from those who have been refused justice here the hope of it in another world.

Workmen are better off than formerly, but inequality is now more visible. On the one hand, capital is incessantly accumulating in the purchase of shares of all kinds—bonds, debentures, and stock of every description—and the number of people who live in idle ease is ever on the increase. On the other hand, men are always most exacting when they feel there is a chance of better days. De Tocqueville admirably explains that people do not rise in revolt when they are the most crushed, but rather when the yoke to be borne has become lighter. He writes, speaking of the close of the eighteenth century in France:—

“As prosperity develops, men’s minds are less confident and seem more uneasy. Public discontent becomes embittered, and a hatred of all ancient institutions rapidly grows. The nation is marching visibly towards a revolution. . . . One would almost feel tempted to say that the French found their position the more intolerable as it improved. This is astonishing, but history furnishes us with many similar instances.”*

Is not this a true picture of what is now taking place?

It was at one time imagined that the teaching of political economy would serve to combat Socialism. But, on the contrary, this science has provided contemporary Socialists with its most formidable weapons. Instead of rejecting economic conclusions, after the example of their predecessors, they accept them without reserve, and bring them forward in proof of their statement that present social conditions are opposed to the principles of right and justice. Economists have proved that all value and all property is derived from labour. Then, add the Socialists, it evidently follows that wealth ought to belong to those whose labour creates it, and that all value—*i.e.*, all the produce—should be the remuneration of its producer. Ricardo, Mill, in fact all the representatives of orthodox science, show that with free competition, in a country where both the population and wealth are on the increase, the revenues of proprietors will also steadily increase, while wages will fall to what is strictly necessary. And Socialists demand whether such a division as this, said to be the result of supposed natural laws, is in accordance with the principles of distributive justice? Political economy has thus furnished Socialism with a scientific basis, and has been the means of its quitting the region of Communistic aspirations and Utopian schemes.

Another reason why Socialism has latterly made such progress is that it is gradually gaining ground amongst the higher and more educated classes. Many Conservative novels, pieces of poetry, newspapers, are imbued with a Socialistic spirit, and this often unconsciously,

* “L’Ancien regime,” &c., chap. xvi.

the authors being themselves adverse to these doctrines. Among the "favoured ones" of Society, as it exists at the present day, the number of those who believe that the "natural laws," if left to themselves, will set all things to rights, is daily diminishing. Nearly all admit that something may be done to improve the condition of the working classes. Those who think, with Gambetta, that there is no social question, are rare. Listen to the words spoken in private or on solemn occasions by sovereigns, ministers, or the chiefs of parties in England, Germany, or Italy; all admit that the social question demands the study of every legislator. It would indeed be hard not to recognize the insufficiency of remuneration of the country labourer and city workman. The rich man in ancient times might enjoy his wealth and say with Aristotle (*Polit.* 1, 3), "There exist in the human species men as inferior to others as the body is to the soul, or as animals are to men. Useful for mere bodily labour, they are incapable of a higher occupation. These men are by nature destined to slavery, as there is nothing better for them than obedience to a master." In the Middle Ages the teachings of Christianity were not yet understood, and the feudal lord considered his serfs as beasts of burden, predestined to labour for him by divine order. Now that the equality of all men as to nature and rights has penetrated the brains and hearts of us all, we must be possessed either of inhuman selfishness, or be most profoundly ignorant, not to feel stirred by the claims of the working classes. To be able to judge of the impression these claims make on minds yearning for justice and the ideal, one ought to read such books as "Unto this Last," or "The Crown of Wild Olive," by Ruskin. I will quote but one passage here: "For most of the rich men of England it were indeed to be desired that the Bible should not be true, since against them these words are written in it: 'The rust of your gold and silver shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire.'"

The great difference between the present situation and any analogous one of which history furnishes us with examples, is that the spread of Socialism is prodigiously favoured by education and by the press. Instruction is offered to all, and even enforced, and all learn to read. Thus books, pamphlets, cheap newspapers, penetrate everywhere, spreading notions of radical reforms. In the Middle Ages a revolt of peasants was a merely local event, speedily put down. The same may be said of those of the sixteenth century. Once fairly crushed, these aspirations for equality disappeared as though drowned in blood. To-day this is no longer the case. The energetic repression of the "Journées de Juin" in 1848, and of the Paris Commune in 1871, only served to spread still further abroad the principles it was desired to stifle, and to give them deeper root in the hearts of the working classes. If Socialism is to be done away with, it must be attacked in its origin and in its means of diffusion. Forbid

Christianity; burn the Bible; teach, with the philosophers of old, that natural inequality justifies slavery; above all, do away with national education and newspapers. If the present inequality of conditions be necessary and permanent, then the spread of the gospel, the founding of a school, the opening of a printing-office, and the extension of the suffrage, are all so many attempts to disturb social order.

Wars, rivalries, and the immense armies maintained by Continental States tend also to accelerate the propagation of that Socialism which it is their mission to combat, and this they do in two ways. In the first place, they increase inequality, on the one hand, by their consumption of productions which would otherwise go to improve the workman's condition; and, on the other hand, loans have to be raised to pay the expenses of wars and armaments, and the interest of these admits of more persons living idle. Secondly, obligatory service draws the youth of the provinces to the great centres, which are more or less strongly imbued with Socialistic tendencies, and thence these new ideas are carried back to the most remote hamlet, where formerly the faith and belief of the past remained unshaken from generation to generation. I do not think that at present the majority of soldiers are Socialists; far from it; but this is the great danger to be dreaded for the present social order, which indeed leans on the support of the bayonet. If this rampart were withdrawn, a terrible overthrow would become inevitable.

Let us now endeavour to separate what truth Socialism contains from the falsehood. The basis of all Socialistic claims is the affirmation that the present social order increases inequality, the workmen's condition becoming daily harder, while the wealth of capitalists and large proprietors is steadily on the increase.—This statement is only true to a certain extent. It is an incontrovertible fact that capital accumulates incessantly in every society in a state of progress, and that the number of those who live on their revenue also increases. The rate of interest and profit tend then to fall; but as the means of production become more and more improved, and immense amounts of machinery of all kinds, representing fixed capital, bring the owners handsome revenues, it follows that the total of interest received and profits gained by the upper classes rapidly increases. To assure oneself that this is indeed a fact, it suffices but to cast a glance at the prodigious display of wealth and luxury to be found in all countries, which is indeed a characteristic of the age. But it is not true that the condition of working men is worse than it was formerly. They have to a great extent benefited by the cheapness of manufactured goods due to the introduction of machinery. Save in very large towns they are better housed, they are invariably better clothed, they have many more articles of furniture of every description. Their diet is more varied, although it has become, for the great majority, almost vegetarian, for the number of domestic animals not having

increased to the same extent as the population, meat is too dear. It can no longer be said of our populations, as Cæsar said of the Germans:—*Major pars victus eorum in lacte, caseo, carne consistit* (De Bel. Gal. vi. 22). The real Socialistic grievance, which unfortunately is too well founded, is this: that the workmen's condition does not proportionately improve with the increase of production, and that their share in the extraordinary development of riches which has taken place during the century has been far too small. I will cite but two testimonies in support of this, but both from the country where capital has accumulated with the greatest rapidity. Mr. Gladstone, in the House of Commons, as long ago as February 14th, 1843, said:—

“It is one of the sad sides of the present social order in our land that the steady increase of wealth of the upper classes and the accumulation of capital should be attended with a diminution in the people's power of consumption, and with a larger amount of privation and suffering among the poor.”

On April 16th, 1863, he again reproduced the same idea in the House. He said:—

“From the year 1842 to 1853 the receipts from the income tax increased 6 per cent. in England, and from 1853 to 1861, 20 per cent. It is an astonishing fact, but it is nevertheless true, that this prodigious increase of wealth benefited solely the well-to-do classes.”

Mr. Fawcett expresses himself to a similar effect thus:—

“Production has increased quite beyond the most sanguine hopes, and yet the day when the workman shall obtain a large share of this increase seems as far distant as ever, and in his miserable abode the struggle against want and misery is as hard as it ever was. The result of this is to create a feeling of profound hostility to the fundamental principles on which society is based.”*

When we look with an unprejudiced eye at the present division of this world's goods, and see, on the one hand, the labourers for their daily bread earning barely what is needful,—less, indeed, than the wherewithal to live if there be the slightest possible crisis,—and then turn our eyes to the other side of the picture, and see the owners of property yearly adding to their estates, and living in ever-increasing ease and comfort, it is quite impossible to bring this into conformity with notions of justice, and one can but exclaim with Bossuet: “The complaints of the poor are just. Wherefore this inequality?” True, the reply may be made: “It has always been thus, and cannot be otherwise.” But this argument can only satisfy those whose privileges it legitimizes. Let us call to mind the stirring words of John Stuart Mill, who spoke like Bossuet on this subject:—

“If therefore the choice were to be made between Communism, with all its chances, and the present state of society, with all its sufferings and injustices —if the institution of private property necessarily carried with it, as a consequence, that the produce of labour should be apportioned, as we now see it, almost in an inverse ratio to the labour, the largest portion to those who have

* “Essays and Lectures on Social and Political Subjects. By Henry Fawcett and Millicent Garrett Fawcett.” 1872. Pp. 4-8.

never worked at all, the next largest to those whose work is almost nominal, and so in a descending scale, the remuneration dwindling as the work grows harder and more disagreeable, until the most fatiguing and exhausting bodily labour cannot count with certainty on being able to earn even the necessaries of life—if this or Communism were the alternative, all the difficulties, great or small, of Communism would be as dust in the balance.”*

Socialism claims for the labourer the integral produce of his labour. Nothing apparently can be more just than that claim.—But if the produce be obtained with the help of two other agents, land and capital, which do not belong to the labourer, the latter cannot then retain it for himself in its entirety.

Socialism says: Labour is now subject to capital; the reverse ought to be the case. Capital, properly speaking, ought to be subject to labour.—Certainly, but for this to be the case, the labourer must be in possession of the means of production; land must belong to the cultivator, and tools and machinery to the artisan. The difficulty would be to arrive at this, now that all industry is carried on on so extensive a scale.

Socialism considers that riches should be no longer the privilege of the idle, that they who do not sow should not be allowed to reap. This is exactly the teaching of St. Paul: “If any will not work, neither shall he eat.”

Man, like every animate being, has wants, and certain means of providing for them. Thanks to artificial laws, which permit of a portion of mankind living at the expense of others, he may satisfy his wants without employing the means given him. But in so doing he commits an offence against the natural law. All this appears clear; but these facts are to be attributed to quiritarian property and to the present laws of succession.

Unless, then, something better can be suggested, present institutions are indispensable in order to stimulate production. What ought to be found, then, is an order of things where—according to the teaching of St. Paul, to justice, and to natural order—ease and comfort shall increase according to the zeal and industry displayed, and shall diminish for the idle.

Machinery, say the Socialists, was to have given workmen greater liberty, and diminished working hours. The reverse is the case. Machinery enriches its owners, but renders the tasks of their work-people harder. The larger the capital engaged in an undertaking, the more necessary it becomes that there should never be any stoppage. Formerly the night brought sleep to all, and Sunday was invariably a day of rest; now on railways, on steamers, in mines, and often in warehouses, factories, and offices, there is no lull in the whirl of business—no repose. Machinery will not fulfil its promise and bring rest to man until it belongs to the labourers who set it going. On

* “Principles,” b. ii., c. i., § 3.

this point Socialists may invoke the opinion of John Stuart Mill, who says: "Machinery has not at present shortened by one single hour the work of a single human being."

Socialists affirm that the means of production are already sufficient to furnish all with enough to live in ease, if the produce were more equally divided. And, indeed, when one thinks of the vast number of useless and superfluous, if not hurtful, articles which are manufactured, and which must occupy so many hours of labour, one is led to believe that if this same time were devoted to the creation of merely useful things there would be sufficient to largely satisfy everyone. Inequality induces luxury, which turns aside the productive forces from producing necessities; hence the destitution of the multitude.

Socialists reproach the present order with pouring all the advantages accruing from social ameliorations into the hands of proprietors, in violation of the principle, generally admitted, that labour is the source of property; and they base their complaint on the theory as set forth by economic science. Here again they might appeal to Mill, for he claims that every increase of revenue not resulting from the owner's personal efforts—*unearned increment*, as he calls it—should be handed over to the State. But Socialism reserves its most bitter attack for free competition. This, they say, reduces workmen's pay to a minimum, lowers the quality of the object sold, and creates hostile interests, while it does not even ensure the promised compensation—viz., cheapness; for large industries run the smaller ones down, and thus having acquired the monopoly, take advantage of their situation and raise the prices. Mill admits that, if competition is the best security for cheapness, it is by no means a security for quality; but he proves beyond a doubt that if, at times, competition lowers wages when hands are in excess, it also raises wages when capital increases faster than the population, and that it at least possesses one most decided advantage, which is, that it reduces the prices of manufactured articles, which must be purchased and paid for with the wages gained by workmen, and therefore, as these go farther, it is as if wages were higher. If there were no competition, it would be as Socialists such as Marx predicted—the full profits gained by the machinery would go to the owners; while now, thanks to competition, the public benefit by the cheapness of goods. Competition is mere liberty in economic relations. It is the most powerful and only efficacious setter-in-motion of all productive activity, of all economic administration, and, more especially, of every amelioration. True, laws and institutions may modify the conditions under which competition is carried on; they may place the competitors on more equal terms, and so arrange matters that each man, possessing the wherewithal to labour, need not be forced to accept insufficient remuneration for his work to avoid dying of hunger. True freedom of contract would then be established, and competition, which is the real

strength of the economic world, would no longer be productive of the disastrous consequence, now attributed to it.

The historian Ranke shows that the attacks made by the Protestants upon the Roman Catholic Church led to the introduction of reforms in the latter, which infused new life into her. In the same way, the most learned economists of the day admit that the criticisms, at times exaggerated, but often well-founded, directed by the Socialists against the present state of society, have been the means of political economy making decided progress. For instance, economists affirmed formerly that our social organization was the result of natural laws, and indeed constituted a *natural order*. It followed that, as says Cairnes, "the well-to-do part of the community retained a comfortable sense that political economy gave them a handsome ratification of the existing form of society as approximately perfect;" and they consequently dismissed any idea of an organization superior to the one in existence as a chimera. At the present day, the majority of economists recognize that everything concerning the division of riches is dependent on laws and customs, which vary from time to time, and that a more rigid application of justice would introduce a great amelioration. Until recently economists studied chiefly the increase of production; they described the distribution of wealth without seeking to discover whether it was just and right. Now it is daily more and more widely acknowledged that the most important of all questions is that of distribution; that in every problem the ethical and judicial side is the one to be principally considered; and that in the labour question the remuneration of the labourer is of paramount importance. One of Germany's most learned economists, Professor Schönberg, writes: "Socialism has forced political economy to recognize that it is something beyond a mere natural science of human selfishness, and that it owns to be a system of moral administration (*ethische Wirthschaft*) of social interests."

The great error of the majority of Socialists is, that they do not sufficiently take into consideration the fact that the great incentive to labour and economy is individual interest. True, minds under the influence of the elevated sentiments of religion or of philosophy will obey impulses of charity, devotedness, and honour; but the stimulant of personal interest and responsibility is necessary to the regular production of wealth.

It follows, then, that a Communistic administration would be always an exception. On the contrary, an organization realizing the desire of all Socialists—the full fruit of his labour to each labourer—would at the same time be the most powerful stimulant and the most just reward for economic activity.

Another Socialist error, which is still more disastrous for the cause they advocate than the one we have just considered, is the belief that a triumphant insurrection would lead to a new order of things

being established by law. A revolutionary assembly can easily do many things ; it may confiscate property, cut off people's heads, and even seize upon all revenue as a sort of land-tax. But the introduction of a collective method of carrying on industry, the setting of trade on a co-operative footing, is beyond its power. As Mill admirably shows in his Chapters on Socialism, reforms such as these necessarily suppose workmen to be possessed of higher intellectual and moral culture than they can possibly acquire otherwise than by slow degrees. The powerlessness of a triumphant Socialist revolution, as far as economic reforms are concerned, was amply demonstrated by the absolute sterility in this respect of the Paris Commune of 1871, and of the Spanish Communes of Carthagen and Seville of 1873.

Mr. William Graham, in his book, "The Creed of Science" ("To the Poor," p. 280), pictures the triumph of a Socialistic revolution, and says:—

"After temporary social chaos, invading all order, extending to all departments of life, exhausted society would joyfully hail any self-styled saviour, promising deliverance from the unendurable delirium and horror of social anarchy. Things after their temporary wrench would revert to their old grooves, society being the sadder, the wiser, but scarcely the better, from the costly and not bloodless experience."

The Russian Socialist, Herzen, in his last letter to the father of Nihilism, Bakounine, writes:—"If even the *bourgeois* world were to be blown up, after the smoke had disappeared and the ashes been swept away, a new but still a *bourgeois* one, would reappear."

If the progress of humanity be not a mere idea, as that of democracy is, according to De Tocqueville, "the most ancient, the most continuous, and the most permanent fact in history," it follows that there will in future be greater equality amongst men ; but violence will never be the means of the accomplishment of social transformations. Attempts at insurrections rather prevent these than otherwise, for they lead to a renewal of despotism, and to the enforcement of stricter and harder laws. The German regicides, Hödel and Nobiling, did their cause great harm. If the Socialists expound their views with persistency, and at the same time with moderation, bringing forward in support of them the powerful arguments of economic science, after the example of Mill and of the ex-Austrian Minister, Albert Schäffle, they would gain the ear of the upper classes, for it is quite impossible to ignore the sentiments of equality and justice which the Gospel places in the hearts of all. The Irish agrarian laws which Mr. Gladstone wrung from the House of Lords are a clear proof that Socialism may obtain most decisive conquests by peaceful means.

EMILE DE LAVELEYE.