The Conflict of Oligarchy and Democracy.

J. ALLANSON PICTON, M.P.

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THE CONFLICT

OF

OLIGARCHY AND DEMOCRACY.

SIX LECTURES

BY J. ALLANSON PICTON, M.A., M.P.

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PREFACE.

On various occasions, when taking part in discussions on Communism, I have found that in the popular mind there is a broad though vague distinction between that and Socialism. I am not aware of anything in the writings of the chief authorities on the subject to justify such a distinction; but in almost any Radical Club it will be found that discussion cannot conveniently be carried on without recognising it. When, for instance, it has fallen to my lot to urge that Socialism involves the suppression of all individual property, even in the form of tools or produce from labour, I have been told that this is not Socialism at all, but Communism, which my interlocutors did not profess to support. When, however, I have pressed for a farther development of the distinction, I have not been very successful in obtaining what I wanted. All I have been able to gather is that Socialism, according to this view, means a regard for the welfare of the community as a whole, and an

unhesitating vigour in repressing, not only privilege, but any inordinate exaltation of the fortune of individuals. The only principle discoverable in this vague kind of Socialism is the superiority of the general interest to all particular interests. This of course is a principle which no one of any school will be found to deny; and the only importance to be attached to the prevalence of this discursive talk about Socialism is the indication it affords of a profound conviction on the part of the many that the principle, though universally recognised, is not observed.

To those whose experience is similar the prevalent fears about the spread of Communistic doctrine must appear almost entirely groundless. Whatever may be the case on the continent of Europe, the so-called Socialists of our rising Democracy have for the most part no idea whatever of abolishing the institution of private property. But they insist very strongly that private property derives its original right from the just claim of a man to retain the produce of his own labour. They would admit indeed that this claim is necessarily limited by the fact that in most cases the labourer works upon raw materials which are not his own, but belong to some one else. Still they suspect that of the

increased value, given by labour to the raw material, too small a portion is retained by the labourer whose industry has created it; and they trace this wrong to institutions, laws, and customs, which tend to concentrate all the profits and advantages of our civilisation in the hands of a few. Therefore they attach great value to the utilitarian formula, "the greatest good of the greatest number"; and their Socialism consists merely in a desire to effect such constitutional and social changes as will bring us nearer to the utilitarian ideal.

But their notions about the changes necessary are very fluid and fluctuating. A considerable number of democrats are greatly taken with Mr. Henry George's doctrine of "land nationalisation"; but the meanings attributed to the phrase are very various. National communism in the use of all natural raw material suggests itself to some; and others have a dream about the possibility of throwing all accumulated capital into one common fund, to be used under some public authority for purposes of production. But it will usually be found that all through such speculations there runs the assumption that the individual labourer will keep intact his house and home, his furniture and tools, nay, his garden plot, and his savings.

The inconsistency between this assumption and the dreams to which I refer is not perceived; and when once it is realised that the destruction of private property in land-tenures, and still more the nationalisation ot capital, involves the suppression of all private property whatever, refuge is taken in the convenient but indefinable distinction between Communism and Socialism.

It was with the hope of giving some help towards a better and more definite direction of these vague Socialistic aspirations, that the lectures here printed were delivered. The aspirations are right and good. It is impossible to deny that the complaints made by the many about the one-sidedness of our civilisation have been amply justified by history, and are still sustained by present experience. But if the grounds of those complaints are to be removed, the multitude must have an intelligent and a definite idea both of the origin of the disadvantages under which they labour, and also of the proper scope of the remedies suggested. In the following lectures I have endeavoured to trace the roots of oligarchy in our history. It is not so much the limitation of political power to a few that I have had in mind, but rather the excessive concentration of wealth, luxury,

and even comfort over a very limited area. I have endeavoured to illustrate both the power and the impotence of political reform ; and have insisted upon the enormous and overwhelming importance of unrestricted education for the million. In the lectures on the Land Monopoly, and On the Distribution of Wealth, I have indicated two definite lines of reform by which reasonable comfort in life might be more equably diffused. And in a concluding lecture, while urging that popular character is necessarily the basis of popular happiness, I have given reasons for taking a hopeful and even sanguine view, not only of the material improvement, but of the moral elevation of the future democracy.

J. ALLANSON PICTON.

March, 1885.

CONTENTS.

LECTURE I.

"The Origin and Growth of the English Oligarchy" . . . 1

LECTURE II.

"Causes and Hindrances of Reform" 21

LECTURE III.

"The Relation of Political Reform to Social Progress" . 41

LECTURE IV.

"The Land Monopoly" 65

LECTURE V.

"The Distribution of Wealth" 89

LECTURE VI.

"Democratic Morals" 113

THE CONFLICT OF OLIGARCHY AND DEMOCRACY.

LECTURE I.

THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF THE ENGLISH OLIGARCHY.

THE British Constitution is commonly described as resulting from the happy balance of three estates—crown, lords, and commons. To these, in old times, it would have been necessary to add a fourth, or rather, perhaps, to interpolate it between the crown and the lords. This estate was the Church, professedly identical with the nation of Englishmen as Christians, but most conspicuously manifest as a hierarchy holding the balance of power between king and nobles, or sometimes dominating both. But after the Reformation this hierarchy, condemned by the Catholic Church as schismatic, and too proud for brotherhood with German, Swiss, or Dutch Protestants, was forced to cast in its lot with the ruling powers at home, and henceforward identified its interests with those of the territorial aristocracy. The Church practically ceased to exist as a separate estate of the realm. Convocation surrendered the power of taxing the clergy. For more than a century it was not allowed to transact any business at all. And though in our time it has reappeared, we view it with something of the same eerie and uncomfortable feeling

that we should probably experience if we met a ghost. So far as constitutional forms are concerned, the political survival of the Church as an estate of the realm is symbolised mainly by the presence of bishops in the House of Lords, and by certain Ecclesiastical Courts;—perhaps we might add also, by the existence of clerical magistrates. Otherwise the political power of the Church, enormous as it continues to be, is exerted almost exclusively by means of social influence. When we come to consider in more detail some special aspects of the conflict between oligarchy and democracy, it may be necessary again to refer to ecclesiastical influence; but for the present let us confine our attention to the three estates of the realm as ordinarily reckoned—crown, lords, and commons.

By the last term—at least for the purpose of our present study—we should not understand only the House of Commons. For that chamber consists of representatives, and it is with the people they represent that we shall be concerned in these lectures, rather than with the lower House of Parliament. In this larger sense the commons consist of all unprivileged persons. Both the sovereign and the lords are born into the world invested with a legal claim to special legislative powers on the demise of their predecessors. But the commons come into the world with no legal claim to anything more than an ordinary share in the rights and duties of Englishmen.

By the second estate, that of the Peers, we mean, if we speak with legal exactness, all those gentlemen whose titles give them, or at any rate are supposed* to give

* The claim is denied by some authorities on Constitutional History.

them, a personal claim to be summoned by the Sovereign to the Upper House. But this narrow definition would exclude a considerable number of persons whose opinions and interests are by various causes identified with the second estate of the realm rather than with the commons. For instance, by a very happy peculiarity of the British constitution all the children of peers are commoners. Properly speaking, as Mr. E. A. Freeman has acutely pointed out, there is no such thing as "noble blood" in this country. For no inheritance of blood by itself is sufficient to distinguish a scion of aristrocracy from the commons. Even the eldest son of a duke is a commoner until he succeeds to the title of his father; and the younger sons, though by courtesy called lords, remain commoners all their lives unless specially created peers. It is not, therefore, the blood that ennobles, but the entailed estates and title. We have not, and never had, any distinct class or caste of nobles, such as existed in France until the Revolution, or such as in a shadowy form exists in Germany to the present day. Our only legal nobility are the peers of Parliament, and all outside of this privileged number, however closely connected by blood with the peerage, are merged in the commons.

But whatever may be the correct method of stating the case legally, the old proverbs hold good that "birds of a feather flock together," and also that "blood is thicker than water." In the political conflicts of our national history the peerage has always shared its aristocratic lustre and imperious temper, not only with its own cadets and scions of nearer or more remote connexion by blood, but also with untitled territorial magnates, and more recently with a new

plutocracy, who suppose themselves to have an interest in defending ancient privilege. Although, therefore, the second estate consists, in strictness, only of some five hundred hereditary legislators, we shall take the liberty of including many satellites and imitators with them, as representing the principle of Oligarchy both in past and present days.

It is not necessary to say much about the first estate of the realm, and that for reasons which will presently appear. The crown of England once represented the culminating issue of feudalism, perhaps the most exaggerated development of feudalism that the world has seen. It was not as an oriental despot, not as a monarch by divine right, not even as a king of men, that William of Normandy reigned, but as a lord of land. The Norman kings were supreme landlords more than anything else. And just as the petty squire of modern times has supposed that his possession of acres gave him the right to appropriate the fruits of other men's labour on those acres, just as he claimed to direct the religion, and politics, and manners of all who lived on his lands, so the royal squire of all England used to claim, as supreme landlord, to take aids, and subsidies, and service from his tenants, and within certain limits to subject them to his orders. That was what the crown of England used to be. But, by a succession of salutary changes, the crown has now come to be simply an impersonation of the executive power of the realm: a power to be always exercised in accordance with the constitutionally ascertained will of the people.

Of course, this is essentially republicanism. Those who regard things more than names can easily understand that

it is not the institution of an hereditary chief magistrate which prevents our being a republic. It is the obstruction of democracy by oligarchy. It is the persistent maintenance, contrary to public policy and national welfare, of class privileges, inconsistent with a commonwealth. The passing Franchise controversy is pregnant throughout with hints of this truth. When politicians talk with scorn of the equal distribution of political power as the domination of "mere numbers," I suspect them of scant respect for mere humanity; for it is that which mere numbers represent. When they argue in favour of representing "classes and interests" rather than "mere numbers," I fear there is in the privileges to be protected something that will not readily commend itself to the common sense and right feeling of the majority. If, after our thousand years of political evolution, we still grope in vain after the ideal of a commonwealth in which each is for all and all for each, it is this oligarchic cowardice and not the British crown that hinders us. A brief glance at the past will make this clear, and will open the avenue of future speculation.

The English monarchy was never, in any proper sense of the word, despotic, except under the dynasty of the Tudors and during the reign of the first two Stuarts. Another exception might be made of the reign of the great William, the first Norman king. A man who has a whole kingdom to distribute at his pleasure among his followers is naturally a dictator. But the great tenants holding from the crown, when once settled in their possessions, soon became a very powerful counterweight to the royal supremacy. The first Henry, the son of the Conqueror, found it necessary to make terms with the

barons, and to renounce arbitrary powers on condition of receiving regulated legal dues, both in money and service. When the infamous John tried to substitute a capricious tyranny for feudal lordship, he found his great tenants too strong for him. The result of the struggle was Magna Charta, the provisions of which are, at any rate vaguely, known to every juvenile debating society. Freedom from arbitrary imprisonment, judgment by a man's equals, fixed courts of justice, condemnation of judicial corruption were assured in the interest of all classes alike. Ancient municipal liberties were restored and guaranteed. And, above all, the exactions of the royal exchequer, with the exception of certain customary and recognised feudal dues, were brought under the control of the great council of tenants in chief, the first germ of an effective Parliament.

I do not suppose that the sub-tenants and labourers outside municipal boundaries gained any great immediate advantage from this charter. The difficulties of communication, when two-thirds of the country were forest or wild moorland, helped to maintain the semi-independent state in which every great landholder reigned over his own domain. His retainers, his husbandmen and servants would experience the spirit of the great charter in his dealings with them just so far, and no farther, than his own good nature, or binding custom, and his sense of policy required. Their impotence may be understood by an analogy of the present day. When a party of filibustering white men have established themselves on the remotest boarders of civilisation in Africa, what chance have their black dependents of justice against them in case of wrong? In the first place, the poor creatures are

so ignorant that they do not know what steps to take. In the next place, the risks of a long journey through forest or desert appear more terrible than their actual suffering. And, finally, they have a shrewd suspicion that power usually sympathises with men in possession. Very similar was the case of English dependents, even after Magna Charta, in relation to their Norman lords.

But the lesson to be chiefly enforced is that the barons kept the advantages of the charter mainly to themselves, because outside the towns they alone understood the political position, and knew how to avail themselves of it. If the common people had known their strength, if they had possessed sense and self-control enough for combination, they might have ante-dated by six hundred years the struggle of democracy against oligarchy. The key to the whole woeful mystery of the oppression of the many by the few through so many ages of the world is not to be found in forms of government, nor in commercial necessities, nor in economical laws, but in popular ignorance. And they are not the truest patriots only, but the most far-seeing philanthropists, who set in the forefront of their policy the emancipation of the multitude from ignorance. King John's barons had not indeed very much education as it is understood in colleges, or even in board schools. It is doubtful whether many of them could have passed the "first standard." But the most effective education is that which gives, not merely a knowledge of books, but a knowledge of things. In our time books are of course an indispensable means of education; but woe unto us if we make them the end! In the thirteenth century, on the other hand, for a knowledge of practical life, books were

not even an indispensable means. The great barons had the advantage of the multitude, not by reason of any skill in reading and writing, much less in languages or mathematics, but by reason of their better understanding of the forces that ruled the world and the methods of their combination. They knew that collectively they were stronger than the King. They understood all the difficulties of union, and were content to make sacrifices to overcome them. They could suppress mutual jealousies in the presence of a great purpose. They estimated at their true worth the power of the Pope, the national feeling of the English clergy, the balance of parties in France; and they knew how to use all such means in turn as occasion served. It was practical wisdom of this sort that gave them their superiority; and when they gained their victory their knowledge of men and things enabled them to use it so as to keep their class supreme, except only in the towns. In the towns alone the stimulus of trade and commerce diffused this sort of practical education amongst the many, and it was in the towns that the seeds of modern English democracy were nourished.

From the time of Magna Charta until the battle of Bosworth, in 1485, the relations of the crown, the barons, and the people remained much the same. The summons of borough representatives to Parliament in 1265, an event pregnant with all following history, was regarded at the time only as a piece of clever tactics for getting money more easily. But, on the other hand, even the most splendid kings, such as the first and third Edwards, and the fifth Henry, were indebted more to strength of character than to any inherent despotic powers for the

supremacy they exercised. Edward I. in the full tide of victory was compelled to abandon illegal taxes, and solemnly to renew the great charter; and the barons demanded that his ministers should have the confidence of Parliament. As to the weaker sovereigns, such as Edward II. and Richard II., they were browbeaten and restrained, humiliated, and finally deposed. Henry IV. was himself a revolted baron, and obtained the crown by gift of Parliament. In fact, through all those reigns the kings of England were simply first among their peers, and were as much limited by the feudal rights of their great tenants, as they were enriched and fortified by their own feudal claims. But it would be a mistake to describe the government in those ages as an oligarchy. For this term expresses an organised union of a few to control the many. But the barons had no such thought in their minds. They were occupied only with their individual rights; and their union was only accidental, occasioned by necessity, while at other times they fell out and fought among themselves. In truth, feudalism was an arrangement standing apart, and difficult to compare with anything else. The nearest definition of it perhaps would be a federation of petty kings kept together for certain special ends by the over-lordship of a suzerain.

But the sanguinary conflict prevalent, during the long reign of Henry VI., between the houses of York and Lancaster, inflicted impoverishment, exile, or death upon so many baronial chiefs that when Henry Tudor ended the feud on the field of Bosworth, he was able to convert the over-lordship of his predecessors into a despotism. The lingering agony of civil war had not only broken the

power of the barons, but it had dispirited the commons. So far were the people's representatives in Parliament from discerning their opportunity in the ruin of the old baronage that, with little resistance, they were made subservient instruments for enriching the crown. This so pleased the new dynasty that the Tudor monarchs thought Parliament an excellent institution, and, after a little hesitation at first, so constantly availed themselves of its aid, that its place in the constitution was confirmed and fortified. The blindness with which the self-confident tyrants nourished the power that was to overturn the throne, and the irony of fate which disguised in decorous servility an omnipotent instrument of rebellion, should teach us both confidence and patience and hope amidst the strange combinations often veiling the real issues of the future. A Tory democracy is a repulsive but by no means an impossible conception. There have always been slaves who hugged their chains. But when, in 1874, household suffrage appeared to justify the infatuated confidence of a new dynasty of Tories, frightened Liberals forgot that apparent reaction is sometimes a necessary phase of evolution. As the subserviency of Parliament in the hands of Thomas Cromwell promoted its use, and ensured its ultimate power, so, perhaps, we may say that the Conservatives, in their joy over a popular triumph, were led to cultivate democratic methods as they had never done before. And this can have but one issue, as is already beginning to be seen. If you catch leviathan asleep, you may perhaps put your hook in his nose. But whether you can lead him after the operation has roused him is altogether a different question.

During the reigns of Henry VIII. and his family the despotic power of the crown seemed firmly established. It was, indeed, decently veiled by parliamentary forms. But the determining force in both foreign and domestic questions was the personal will of the sovereign, or in the case of the boy king, Edward VI., of his protectors. Yet so long as the vitality of a race endures its character cannot be eradicated. That character may be apparently suppressed in the exhaustion induced by a period of passion, like the dynastic wars of the Roses. But exhaustion itself brings rest and recuperation; and then with a new stimulus comes revival and resurrection. In the case of our own country, the new stimulus was given by the rise of Puritanism. The theological vagaries of that age have little interest for us now, except so far as they were the accidental forms of a moral awakening. The feature in Puritanism that interests me is its stern sense of individual responsibility overmastering all conventional traditions and lazy habits of acquiescence. The true spiritual descendants of the Puritans are not those who tread a monotonous round of religious or secular customs, tethered by sectarian creeds, or by inherited social bonds. They are rather those who find conscience more authoritative than all the churches and all the Fathers to boot. But let us take heed lest we confound self-will with conscience. For the true Puritan was, and is, a man overwhelmed by a realisation of his own direct and unreserved subordination to an Eternal Power, high above all kings, or potentates, or priests. And whatever name you give it—a matter of little concern in this connexion, be it God, or the Universe, or Nature, or Law—that Power

is the only inviolable sovereign, enthroned on reality, manifested and embodied in everlasting order.

Now it was the awakening of Puritanism in this sense that troubled the latter years of Elizabeth's reign with the tremors of a coming earthquake. And it was the manhood begotten of responsibility, the dignity inspired by loyalty to eternal law, that safeguarded the perilous revolution of the next age, and made it restorative and constructive rather than destructive. The consummation of the struggle in 1689 effectually disposed of the chances of despotism in Great Britain; and the Act of Settlement in 1701 extinguished all nonsense about divine right. That Act may be described as the determination by authority of Parliament of the line to be taken by hereditary succession to the crowned presidency of the British Commonwealth. And it is one of those happy compromises which reconcile past and present without any surrender of principle. Since that Act, notwithstanding some frantic spurts of royal self-will, the dignity of the crown has been more and more identified with an impartial and impersonal administration of the law as determined by Parliament, and under the responsible advice of ministers. Were it conceivable—which I do not think it is—that the advice of responsible ministers should be rejected, the Act of Settlement is no more unalterable than any other statute. I do not here enter on the question whether a more ideal arrangement may be possible in the exhaustless future. What I have said is sufficient to suggest that the political genius of the British people has succeeded in the apparently impossible task of reconciling monarchical forms with a substantially republican constitution.

But a republic is not necessarily a democracy. And though the enormous development of parliamentary rule since the Revolution may justify what I have now said as to the reconciliation of monarchical forms with a republican constitution, yet the day of democracy is still to come. The parliamentary victory over the Stuarts by no means transferred power to the commons, at least in the larger sense of that term. As the Tudor despotism rose on the ruins of the baronage, so the Stuart dynasty was finally disestablished by an oligarchy; while the common multitude, in either case, were only as spectators who might sympathise or applaud, but could do little more. At the Revolution the vessel of State escaped from a stormy whirlpool of passionate vicissitudes into a peaceful current, flowing straight toward democracy; but the issue was unseen then, and is only now coming clearly into view. The constituencies returning the Parliaments of William III. and Mary were not those instituted by the wise reforms of the great Oliver. For, at the Restoration, the Parliamentary system had reverted to what it was before the Civil War, and representation had hardly any rational proportion either to numbers, intelligence, or wealth. Through change of circumstances, and decay of the institutions that originally moulded it, the representative system had become degraded into the most convenient tool that oligarchy could possibly have desired. A military force is the proper instrument of personal rule, or imperialism; but it is a very dangerous weapon for an oligarchy to handle, as the Long Parliament found to its cost in the days of its decay. What serves an oligarchy best is a pretence of popular self-government so devised

as to exclude the reality. And the great families of the eighteenth century found this ready to their hand. The centres of modern life, round which the elements of democracy have gathered, were either wholly unenfranchised or ridiculously under-represented. But while millions of capable citizens had no representatives, many representatives had no electors They were nominated by landowners in some cases, and in others by close corporations. The freemen, who, like the peers, held political power by accident of birth or purchase, valued their privileges, like their betters, for the profit to be made out of them. Bribery was open, shameless, unrebuked. And thus the whole pretended representation of the people was practically in the hands of a few great patrons, who bought and sold, like all merchants, with a view to their own gain.

I must now revert to a remark made a little time ago in speaking of the old baronage in the days before the Tudors. I said that, all powerful though these nobles were, they could not be described as an oligarchy, because this means an organised union of the few to control the many. Such an idea never entered into the heads of the barons. They had no need of it. Their powers were undisputed by their feudal dependants, and in the rude plenty afforded to a very sparse population, they could live and let live without grudging. It was the crown they distrusted, not the people. And what they wished to guard against the crown was not so much the interest of their class, but rather their individual independence.

But the case was very different with the great families to whom the Revolution handed over political power. As a military system feudalism had then long been dead.

But as a social system it survived, and circumstances had combined to throw all its privileges into the hands of the few, while whatever benefit the humble retainers had once found in it were extinct. It is a familiar story how the great landholders in the first Parliament of Charles II. threw off all their own feudal burdens, and generously granted the Crown, in compensation, an ample excise on the drink and tobacco of the people. And though the costs of war afterwards compelled them to submit to a land-tax, they succeeded in arranging it on such favourable terms that the public were gradually cheated of their legitimate revenue from the national domain. Feudal sub-tenancies had already been long exchanged for mere rent-paying occupancies. But while the landlords or crown tenants carefully nursed this commercial relationship so far as it enriched them, they kept up all the old habits of feudalism, so far as these could be applied to the advantage of landlords in a modern age. If farmers were not summoned to appear in arms to fight for their lord, they were expected, as a matter of course, to back his opinions at the polling booth. If they had not to pay fees for the knightood of his son, they were bound to return the boy to Parliament. In religion, as in politics, they must follow their owner, and take their chance of heaven or hell as his chosen parson might direct. How much they might keep out of their earnings was for his benevolence or greed to decide, and every stick and stone they put upon the land, every improvement by which they raised its value, remained his unbought property whenever he chose to turn them out. To keep up rents the price of corn was forced up by duties on imports, and bounties on exports,

paid at the expense of hungering millions. To keep down wages, rates were extorted from all forms of thrift and industry to supplement the niggardly dole of agricultural employers. And lest the poor should learn the strength that lay in their numbers, old laws against combination were cruelly worked, and new ones were imposed by men who were at once witnesses, judges, and legislators in their own interest.

Such statesmen as Walpole and William Pitt were, of course, not wholly blind to the injustice and mischief of the territorial and financial system of their time. But though they dreamed of reform, the oligarchy was too strong for them, and both alike had to give way to the stolid self-immolation of a pugnacious people. How immortal is popular folly! And how changeless its essential features amid the caprices of fashion! Two delusions, the one that of protection, the other that of military glory, seem to be so ingrained in the very heart and soul and life of poor humanity that nothing short of torture by hunger seems ever wholly to disenchant a people. Only the horrors of famine drove us into free trade; and such is the inveteracy of humbug upon this subject that we only retain our privileges now because no section of consumers can be found benevolent enough to be willingly robbed for the benefit of the rest. But in the eighteenth century, and in the beginning of our own age, people were used to it; and everyone, except a few supposed madmen, believed that the infallible way to increase national gains was to choke commerce by restrictions. Only think that for more than a hundred years, a whole nation submitted

to be starved in order to pamper a few thousand landlords. That is the plain fact in few words. And nothing could illustrate more startlingly the tyrannic spell by which the millions, resistless if they had known it, were held enslaved. The only folly that could match it was the sanguinary mania mistaken for patriotism. When Sir Robert Walpole, against his sober judgment, was forced into war to avenge the cropped ear of the adventurer Jenkins, joy-bells were rung in many a town. "They may ring their bells now," said he, "but they will be wringing their hands soon."

Yet there is no doubt that the tremendous efforts made by this country to fight all the world, served admirably the interests of certain limited classes. Army supplies, ship-building, the growth of national debt, and opportunities for speculation, caused a wonderful flow of profit into the pockets of various contractors and manufacturers. At the same time glorious careers were opened for scions of the aristocracy, and splendid pensions were earned. But the tendency of such ill-gotten national gains is always to concentration, never to diffusion. Fortunes might be made, but wages sank, and provisions rose to famine prices. Squires might rejoice at news of their gallant sons; but when their labourers on seven shillings a week, with wheat at £5 a quarter, would drown their misery in beer, drinking the health of the young master, and would hiccup forth the lying chorus that "Britons never will be slaves," it was a sorry satire on the sort of patriotism advocated by an interested oligarchy.

Is that tyrannic spell of class interests over popular delusions exhausted yet? Why, it is not ten years since

the wicked folly of the last Afghan war was applauded and cheered, and the still more criminal madness of protecting Turkish devilry at the risk of European war, was the fond theme of popular song. Whose interests would that have served? Who are the gainers by the policy that threatens to embarrass us with half of Africa in addition to India? It is almost maddening to hear the canting talk of "British interests," with the vulgar and fallacious interpretation put upon the phrase. For British interests do not concern wholly, or mainly, statesmen and military officers, or even capitalists, merchants, and bondholders. But British interests ought to mean fulness of life for the whole thirty-six millions of our fellow-countrymen. It is not their wages only that I care about, but their cultivation, the refinement of their perceptions, the extension of their sympathies, the elevation of their pleasures, the enlargement of their energies, the ennoblement of their views of life. But all this requires education, sanitation, improved dwellings, healthy literature, the popularisation of art and science. And these again are impossible without thrift, both national and individual. But while our resources are squandered, and our attention distracted by sanguinary enterprises all over the world, the more substantial British interests will never receive the care or sacrifices they deserve.

And what is the remedy? The remedy is, I verily believe, the conversion of oligarchy into democracy; a belief I hope to justify in the course of these lectures. The sense in which I employ the first term is, I trust, apparent now, though I have not given more than a passing definition. Whatever the forms of a constitution

may be, so long as it works mainly for the benefit of a limited class, whether landholders or capitalists, it is practically an oligarchy. It would be contrary to human nature if such a class did not endeavour to keep power in its hands. Nor is it necessarily open to unreserved condemnation on that account. For it is quite possible that it is unable to understand how the country could survive except by methods which custom disguises as laws of nature. Indeed, nothing is more honourable to our native land than the fact that so many have broken with the prejudices of their birth and breeding to champion the cause of the people at large regardless of all class interests. But such acknowledgments cannot neutralise the truth that down to the present day political power, though far more just than ever before, is still specially careful of an old social and territorial system incongruous with the age. At the commencement of this lecture we remarked that when we speak of our constitution as comprised of crown, lords, and commons, we should not confine the second term to peers of parliament. Practically as well as socially that aristocratic element includes all great landowners, and is thus very prevalent in the House of Commons as well. The power of great families has indeed almost passed away. But if any one should hold that oligarchic rule passed away with it, I would put to him a test case. Why is it that we still endure land laws and game laws, which make the soil of our native land a luxury of the rich instead of the basis of labour? To me it seems that this, like the long continuance of corn-laws, is only explicable by the survival of oligarchic rule.

Finally, the democracy I would put in contrast would

mean the rule of popular opinion after free discussion, and by means of a parliament fairly representing the unbribed and unconstrained views of the majority. For the fulfilment of this ideal, members should be distributed in strict proportion to the population represented, and all collateral standards of assessments or distance should be discarded. Classes and interests are only of value in proportion to the number of people concerned in them or affected by them. If it be said that landowners and farmers are important to the population outside their own ranks, I would observe that the same thing may be said with equal truth of doctors and schoolmasters. But no one advocates giving the latter a special representation. It is not necessary; because the population at large may be trusted to know and feel what classes and interests are important to them. To such questions, however, we shall have to return. Meantime it is sufficient to note how history, so far as we have traced it, shows us the millions managed by the hundreds in the interest of the hundreds. It remains hereafter to note the efforts hitherto made, or yet to be made, in order that vote and interest, power and profit, progress and growth, may be managed and administered amongst the millions themselves with a nearer approach to equality.

LECTURE II.

CAUSES AND HINDRANCES OF REFORM.

THE view of English History exhibited in the preceding lecture is of course incomplete. I have been concerned only with the devolution of political power, and this I have described as passing at successive periods through the stages of feudalism, despotism, and oligarchy. But the devolution of political power is after all only one among many processes in the complicated life of a nation, and the farther progress of political development during the present century cannot be explained without a reference to other aspects of our history. The English race has always been characterised by a strong and keen sense of personal rights. Yet this has rarely taken a sentimental form. The peasants who in the fourteenth century were roused by John Ball and followed Wat Tyler were not actuated by any abstract ideas of liberty or human dignity, but by intolerance of shameful misery. The rising of Cade in the following century was more distinctly political in its aims. But he also exemplified the practical nature of the politics of his party by his sanguine promises about the size of pint pots and the price of fat capons. Even Cromwell's Ironsides, though strongly tinged with fanaticism, were singularly business-like in their ineffectual attempts at a settlement with the infatuated king. However wild some of their religious notions, their ideas about more

mundane affairs were really summed up in the common motto, "live and let live." Indeed, fairness as between man and man has, in the politics of the English Commons, been always the actuating principle much more than any "visions of a perfect state." All sorts of policies, imperial and commercial, arrogant and truckling; all sorts of leaders, aristocratic and vulgar, heroic and selfish, have in turns swayed their passions. But the popular song which expresses contempt for any one who would "rob a poor man of his beer," hints very suggestively at the limit of their toleration. They would not, if they could help it, allow their right to a reasonable enjoyment of life to be questioned. But this being granted, they have been for the most part far too careless about the form of their government.

Perhaps I may exhibit more clearly at once the sturdiness and the unsentimental nature of this English sense of personal right by examples pointing two extremes of character between which it lies. In the vast empire of India, the dread responsibility for whose welfare is too little realised amongst us, recurrent periods of famine have slain hundreds of thousands by starvation. But such famines have rarely, if ever, been the occasion of serious disturbance. No such uprising as the Sepoy mutiny has ever sprung from such a cause. The people lie down in the roads and die, like flies smitten by a frost. Fate is upon them, and they are silent, without even a muttered curse upon their lips. Amongst all the millions threatened from time to time by such a horror, the notion of self-help never seems to occur. The right to life is not a conscious sentiment. The famine, like the sunset, is in the inevitable

course of nature, and they have no more thought of resenting the one than the other. Such abject resignation cannot be paralleled, perhaps, amongst any western race. But whether the Englishman has a more imperious appetite than most, or whatever be the cause, certain it is that he is very speedily moved to vigorous action by any curtailment—I will not say of his beef, for time was when he rarely tasted it—but of his bread, and cheese, and beer. Witness the action of the "club-men" in the time of the great civil war. When the fight between King and Parliament began to threaten farmers, labourers, and village tradesmen with ruin, in the districts where it raged, these poor people, armed for the most part only with clubs, scythes, and pitchforks, conceived the daring purpose of resisting both contending armies, and defending their household goods against either. As to Magna Charta or the new Petition of Right, they knew and cared nothing. But they had a right to live, and to the means of life; and for this right they were ready to fight either King or Parliament, or both in succession.

It would be difficult, I think, to match this audacity in any records of Continental wars. Still, no mob of any western race would die of starvation without striking a blow against fate. The great French Revolution was hurried on by lack of bread; and when the maddened mothers of perishing families marched out to Versailles and dragged the King, Queen, and Dauphin to Paris, they shouted, as they returned, "We have brought the baker, the baker's wife, and the baker's son." But this popular uprising in France was speedily distinguished from any analogous movements in England, by the rapid pre-

dominance of grand phrases and formulas over practical demands. "Liberty, equality, and fraternity" are fine words; but when men are so charmed with their sound that they shirk the patient labour and self-control necessary to evolve the practical realities represented, the result is often the very reverse of what was desired. It is impossible to deny that something of this kind occurred in the sequel of the French Revolution. Satisfied with asserting their liberty, the people were content to leave in the hands of the official class a degree of irresponsible power which the more practical English race has never willingly tolerated. Intoxicated with the glorious idea of a fraternity wide as humanity, they insisted upon realising this idea by force of arms, and thus sold themselves to a family of military adventurers. But throughout the whole story, sometimes glorious, oftener dismal, our neighbours have deluded themselves with the flattering notion that they were worshipping ideas, when in reality they had become the slaves of phrases.

Now English political feeling appears to me to represent a mean between the two extremes that I have described. Substantial wrongs, injustice that robs the home or hearth, have never been patiently endured by the English race. But on the other hand, if they could get along with reasonable security for life and earnings, they have not troubled themselves much as to the sentimental aspects of the political forms under which they live. I would not have it supposed that I regard our race as sordid, or incapable of inspiration. So far am I from this, that I believe, if the facts are accurately weighed, it will be found that no nation in the world has ever made such

sacrifices for principle. But then the condition has always been that the principle must be represented by some concrete need, and not merely embodied in eloquent phrases. Fresh proof of this is afforded by the fact that next to the sense of tangible personal wrongs, nothing has ever given so decisive an impulse to political progress amongst us as authoritative outrage upon conscience. For illustrations of this it is sufficient to refer to the lessons we gathered, in a previous series of lectures, from the rise and fall of the Commonwealth.

We must keep these characteristics of our race in view if we would understand either the long delay, or the recent rapid progress, of political reform. After the Revolution the chief causes of former discontent had been very largely diminished. The consent of the people's representatives had become an indispensable preliminary to taxation. The evils of billeting and of forcible enlistment had been greatly lessened. Illegal imprisonment had become, if not impossible, at least very exceptional. The Toleration Act gave considerable freedom of religious organisation. All these together did not amount to an ideal settlement of the kingdom; and a less practical people would have found ample reason for continued disturbances. But, on the whole, our forefathers at the beginning of last century found they could work together comfortably by means of these rough compromises, and, therefore, they contrived to ignore the absurd irrationality of an effete representative system. To this contented mind the absence of any acute distress and the comparative sparsity of the population very much contributed. Of course the nation, considered as a whole, was very much

poorer than it is now; but then the wealth that existed was somewhat more evenly distributed. The food of the labouring class was far inferior to what is obtainable now; but it was not generally deficient in quantity. And if cottages were sparely and rudely furnished, there were fewer millionaires to accentuate the contrast by the multitude of their splendid palaces. When times of trouble and dearth came, the distress was within more manageable limits, and it was comparatively easy for the comfortable classes to enjoy the luxury of effective charity. Thus, during the greater part of the eighteenth century the people contented themselves with their government, such as it was; and suggestions of reform fell comparatively flat.

The Earl of Chatham, in his younger days, did indeed attempt to interest his aristocratic friends in projects for a reform of the representative system. But he does not appear to have been greatly disappointed that he met with no support. His brilliant son, in 1782, moved for a select committee on Reform, but was defeated by 161 to 141. In 1785, William Pitt, as Prime Minister, made a singular proposal, which it is worth while to notice because of the absurd extreme to which it carried the doctrine of vested interests. He treated the right of representation in Parliament as a property, to be estimated by pecuniary value. There is no doubt that the state of things existing in that day fully justified him in doing so. For the ownership of a pocket borough was far more valuable than even the ownership of a church living, and the enormous amount of money spent in small towns at election times was no inconsiderable element in the trade of the place.

Now we all know how vested interests in public abuses are treated in our own day. The abuse, whether in the form of land monopoly or ecclesiastical exclusiveness, is solemnly condemned; but at the same time it is piously suggested that property has a sacredness which cannot safely be outraged; and the compensation demanded by vested interests before the population can enjoy their own again is usually put at a very high figure. William Pitt's proposal sounds like a satire on such doctrines. He suggested that the right of representation in Parliament might be bought for a sum of money from thirty-six small boroughs, and that the right thus purchased might be transferred to counties or populous places. And farther, with more foresight than is usually characteristic of reformers, he proposed to make permanent provision for repeating the process as often as might be necessary. Thus, whenever a poor decayed borough had fallen below the figure justifying representation in Parliament, the burgesses would have had the consolation of receiving a good round sum from the Government as the price of surrendering the claim to which they had no longer any just title. Mr. Pitt, however, was defeated. Every member for a small borough was afraid lest his own might be amongst the thirty-six; and, as it was improbable that his constituents would share the plunder with him, he voted against the Government. From that time forward William Pitt abandoned the cause of Reform, and, much against his will, he was speedily dragged into foreign complications and sanguinary wars, such as have always neutralised democratic progress at home.

But, at the close of the century, several causes con-

tributed to create the discontent that has unfortunately been, as a general rule, the essential condition of popular interest in better government. The corn-law then in existence kept up the price of bread; and, while the home supplies were very inelastic, the population was rapidly increasing. Manufactures had already been considerably expanded, and the concentration of workpeople in great centres had already begun. Disputes about wages were carried on under all the disadvantages of the Combination Laws and the tyrannical interpretation of the common law on the subject of conspiracy. The growing distress occasioned by such causes naturally drew attention to any laws that could be supposed to favour the rich at the expense of the poor. This again led men to ask themselves how it was that such laws could be framed and maintained. The poor were in a vast majority; and though the constitution of the country was ridiculously inconsistent with its theory, it was even then supposed that the common good was guaranteed by the necessity of popular consent to all legislation. The discontented therefore began to question how it was that the theory was so inconsistent with the practice; and when once this question was asked, it speedily became apparent that the machinery of the constitution was exceedingly ill adapted to work out the theory.

Such reflections, and the political unrest arising from them, were considerably stimulated by the great French Revolution. This Revolution had been preceded by an outburst of philosophical and political speculation in France the influence of which extended more or less to this country. The result was that clubs and

associations began to be formed for the purpose of mending the constitution. Although the grandfathers of many of us were born before the beginning of this century, that period is separated from us by such enormous changes that the condition of things then existing is almost as difficult to realise as the buried Assyrian empire. Even the most intelligent of popular audiences have probably but little idea of the extent to which the House of Commons was then the mere tool of a privileged few. I shall make no apology, therefore, for giving some facts which to the historical student are of course familiar.

In the year 1793 one of the most remarkable petitions ever addressed to Parliament was presented to the House of Commons, urging a reform in the representation of the people. It was remarkable, not only because of its length, but because of the clear, incisive, outspoken language in which it was composed, and the careful elaboration of the case it stated. The signatories called themselves an association of friends of the people; and the main object was to show in a glaring light the wrongs done by the absurd travesty of representation into which the people's House had degenerated. The facts alleged were so startling that the petitioners, in token of their good faith, felt it necessary to declare themselves ready to adduce legal proof of every allegation. They stated that out of 658 members of the House of Commons, seventy were returned by thirty-five places where there were practically no voters at all. One of them was the desolate mound of Old Sarum, from which all signs of habitation had disappeared. The rest were ancient decayed boroughs where the holders

of a few "burgage tenures," as they were called, had entirely surrendered whatever political rights they had ever possessed to the Lord of the Manor, who could have sent up his butler or valet to Parliament had he so pleased. In addition to these seventy members, ninety more were elected by forty-six places, in none of which were there more than fifty voters. In most of these, likewise, either the Lord of the Manor was the dictator, or a few possessors of corrupt privilege pocketed their fees and returned the man who paid them. The petitioners went on to specify various classes of boroughs, with voters in no case exceeding two hundred; and summing up these places they showed that an actual majority of the House of Commons was returned by such constituencies as these. No census of the population was taken at that time. The only means of estimating it were the lists made by tax-gatherers. From these it was found that the number of householders paying taxes in England and Wales was a little short of one million; and of this number 939,000 were without any franchise at all unless they purchased it, which of course very few cared to do. The purchase was not, I suppose, by way of direct bargain and sale, but by payment of fees for entry into privileged bodies which at that time had the election of members.

It seems incredible that such a ridiculous mockery of representation should have been allowed to exist for forty years longer without reform. Both incentives which we have noted as always effective with English people existed in growing strength. The physical misery of the populace always verged on starvation; and periodically went over the verge. The Toleration Act did not prevent religious in-

equalities that insulted the faith of a large number amongst the middle classes. Thus in the case of thirty boroughs, where the members were returned to Parliament by the municipal corporations, all Papists and Dissenters were excluded from the franchise by the operation of the Test and Corporation Acts. Yet this misery and this shame were patiently endured until the time when the elder amongst us were coming into the world. How was this?

The mystery is solved by the explanation which we have too often found applicable to popular tolerance of wrong. It was the "gunpowder and glory business"; it was the pomp of war and pride of slaughter; it was the rapid and unholy gains poured into the lap of a fortunate few by the enormous expenditure upon armaments—such was the secret of the comparative inattention of the people of this country throughout a whole generation to Parliamentary abuses that should have been intolerable. If the newly enfranchised, if the working classes of our great towns, with their enormously increased political power, will not learn this lesson emblazoned in horrid characters on every page of our sanguinary history, their blood must be on their own heads. They will now have no one to blame but themselves. I am not for "peace at any price"; I am aware that in the mysterious constitution of this world the struggles of war have been in the past amongst the conditions of progress; and though I am certain that it is not and cannot be an everlasting condition, yet I cannot pretend to any confidence that the day has yet dawned when armaments can be regarded as wholly unnecessary. But of this at least I am convinced, that if on our part no war other than strictly defensive were ever

henceforth to be tolerated, and if we confined our ideas of defence to actual maintenance of acquired rights, we might soon diminish our army by one half, and at least be at rest from panics about our fleet.

Of course all wars are said to be defensive. But then they are made so by interpretations non-natural and contrary to common sense. The war against the French Republic and against the French Empire was supposed to be defensive. Our monarchical institutions were believed to be threatened, our religion to be menaced by French atheism. Besides, if the French took Egypt they might oust us from India, and then what would become of the fortunes of the great East India Company? Still farther, the aggressive Republic of France was threatening Holland, and we were entangled in treaties which compelled, or were interpreted as compelling us to go to the rescue, no matter what the cost might be to our own suffering poor. By such arguments it was, and is still, maintained that the war against France was purely defensive, and could not honourably be avoided. Then, when the ill-feeling engendered between the two nations naturally suggested to Bonaparte the destruction of English commerce by closing Europe against us, it was easy to persuade the groaning taxpayers that there was no help for them now but the destruction of their enemy at any cost. Thus, like desperate gamblers, they played double or quits, until at last they spent as much money as would have endowed every labourer in the country with a cottage and garden ground, freehold for ever.

I know the struggle was not without its compensations. I am as proud as any one can be of "British pluck" But

I think the time is come—aye, and had come at the beginning of the century—when pluck might be shown in nobler forms than those we share with the bulldog. I fully recognise the force and brilliancy with which Prof. Seeley, in his "Expansion of England," has urged the development of political capacity, the inspiration of legitimate ambition, the wide extension of our race, language, ideas, and literature, as the happy consequences of our pugnacity. But I do not believe that such results were attainable only by war; and I contend that the fate, if fate it was, which drove us to the choice of such means, robbed us of more than half the value of our gain.

Prof. Seeley himself commends, as a not unprofitable exercise, speculation on the different issues that would have arisen had the course of history been other than it has been. Think, then, what might have been the result if the better instincts of William Pitt had been followed, and he had engaged his countrymen in domestic reforms instead of foreign conquest. He would have maintained the right of the French to manage their own affairs without interference from us. And if continental powers chose to make war on them, he would have suffered fanatical republicans, stolid despots, and infatuated emperors to fight it out amongst themselves, while Great Britain maintained a strict neutrality. Then there would have been no continental decree against English commerce. Egypt might—probably would—have fallen to the French, and a considerable part of India might have followed—for a time. But with the rest of Europe on her hands, Republican France would scarcely have wantonly attacked the distant dependencies of Great Britain. The rapidly growing com-

merce of this country would have derived an enormous impulse from the advantages inevitably falling to a neutral. Harried industries would have fled hither, as did the Flemings and the Huguenots in previous ages. The tendency would have been to associate England in politics, as well as in commerce, with the young republic of the West, instead of the crumbling system of the old world. Reconciliation and amity would thus have been hastened; the war of 1812 would probably have been avoided; and though nothing would have disillusionised the States as to their protectionist superstitions, our present cordial relations would have been anticipated by a generation.

Meantime the caldron of war in Europe would have boiled until it overflowed and extinguished the passions and corruptions that set it seething. But the humiliation of France could hardly have been so complete as it was made by the alliance of our naval supremacy and financial resources with continental armaments. It is surely not unreasonable to conjecture that the result of the more equal balance of forces would have been the destruction of French imperialism on the one hand, and of old world tyrannies on the other. No triple or quadruple alliance of monarchs would have been in a position to resettle Europe in their own interests. The Revolution which, in spite of all opposition, has permanently remodelled France, would have left its mark more conspicuously on the constitutional forms of all European countries except Turkey and Russia. No second Empire would have demoralised our neighbours. German patriotism would have found nobler scope in the development of free institutions than in the triumphs of war. Italy must have been unified early in the century;

Mazzini and Garibaldi would have had a more peaceful if not a more glorious mission. In the exhaustion of Russia and the preoccupation of Austria with constitutional changes, Constantinople might have become once more the capital of a revived Greek Empire, and the Turk banished into Asia. If these things did not happen it was because the natural course of events was disturbed and distorted by the mad insistance of our statesmen on stemming the tide of the French Revolution. They did succeed in damming it up for a time and leading it into artificial channels. But the barriers were not permanent; and they have yet to be swept away in fresh complications of ruin. The natural issue of that great uprising would have been to revolutionise Europe; and if Europe had been revolutionised at the beginning of the century, perhaps it would not be bristling with bayonets now.

Nor would the natural development of the French Revolution have been disadvantageous to any real interest of our own country. A neutral nation, with commercial instincts, with an expanding population, with enormous resources in coal and iron, and unhindered access by sea to all parts of the world, must necessarily have had the first and best opportunities of profitable colonisation. As to India—that splendid peril, which inspires Tory editors with a spirit of prophecy, and periodically, like conscience, makes cowards of us all—whatever might have been the case with the natives of that country, the absence of responsibility for their government would, in my view, have been a distinct gain to the natives of this. But it is hardly likely we should have been saved from that responsibility by the course of events I have suggested. Having no military or

naval object to serve there, France would have yielded to the necessities of European conflict, and so far have withdrawn her attention from India that the relative position there would have probably become much the same as it is. But the principal advantage we should have gained by abstinence from the carnival of blood would have been the anticipation by thirty years of the Reform era, and comparative freedom from the cruel burden of debt which now costs us twenty-eight millions a year. For as the question of Reform was undoubtedly shelved by the distraction of public attention to foreign wars, it is safe to conjecture that had peace been preserved, this question would have forced its way to the front. And surely we should have been happier and better at this moment, nearer the solution of the terrible problems of pauperism, intemperance, ignorance, and the land famine, if our grandfathers, amidst their more brilliant and heroic qualities, had possessed the common sense to mind their own business. In fact, we should have been in the position yet in store, we hope, for our great-grandchildren. It is a bitter pleasure to conjure up visions of the inheritance thus deferred—universal free education, free trade in land, secularised Church property, security and hope for farmers, co-operation and diffusion of profits in trade and manufacture, improved dwellings, higher morality, culture, and mental pleasures made accessible to all. But I trust we are not so self-centred that we cannot rejoice in the better fortune of those who come after us, our own flesh and blood, for whose advancement we toil and strive. And perhaps the most precious heritage we can hand down to them is the conviction inwrought into the inmost

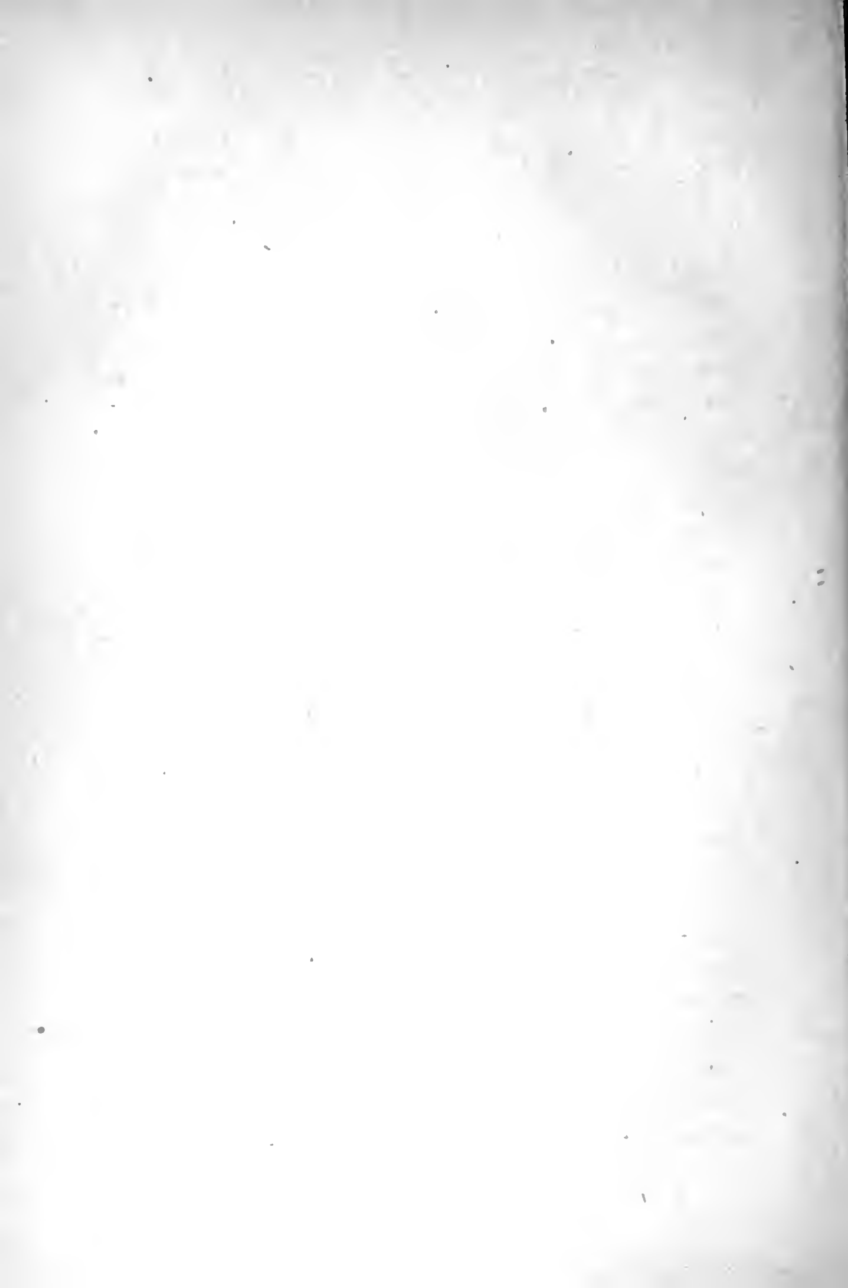
texture of the life they draw from us, that amongst nations, as amongst individual men, violence, and passion, and pride make a desert of long coming years.

The demoralising influence of war did not cease with its termination. The nation, which in 1793 seemed ripe for reform, was in 1815, at the restoration of peace, still seventeen years from the goal. As an occasional drunkard, after a week's dissipation, has to wait several days before he can resume the current of his life, and then does so at a disadvantage, so, after the fierce intoxication, and splendid but futile dreams of that long passion, the British democracy was dazed, and weary, and dull, incapable of the organisation and toil necessary for the victories of peace. The country was pervaded by disbanded or invalided soldiers, all whose talk was of guns and drums, and sieges and slaughter. Then, also, the changes in business and a certain expansion of trade when the world-wide state of siege came to an end, brought the usual fortunes to a few capitalists and speculators. But lest British interests should suffer by too great a plenty of food, the corn law, the landlord's guarantee of rent, was made more stringent and secure. Thus farmers received high prices, and the poor-rates, to supplement the starvation wages of the labourers, were borne with the less grumbling by the foolish shopkeepers and professional people. For when rents were high, and cheerfully paid, surely every one must be well off. But how few they were who really profited by the peace may be judged by one or two facts. Up to 1820 wheat was nearly £5 a quarter, and an agricultural labourer had to work twelve or fourteen weeks to earn as much. Even skilled artisans thought a pound a

week good wages. But in 1818 the poor-rate in England and Wales amounted to £8,000,000, or 13s. 9d. a head for the whole population.* What wonder, then, that fierce discontent began to shake the foundations of society? Yet worshippers of established power talked then, as they talk now, about the impossibility of healing social distress by political reforms; and successful men of business preferred to mitigate suffering by charity rather than risk the disturbance of profitable trade by changes thought to be revolutionary. Miserable mill-hands were cut down in the streets of Manchester by sleek mounted farmers, who owed their good condition to the starvation of the men they murdered. But now the spirit of the people was roused. Things had come to that pass that for the majority of the nation life was unendurable, and they thought little of risking it in the effort to relieve their wretchedness. Nightly drilling went on amongst the Lancashire and Yorkshire dales; arms were secretly prepared. A thousand men, carrying nothing but a blanket to wrap them in at night, resolved to march on London, that, if possible, they might frighten the capital and the Government with their gaunt despair. Birmingham and Bristol became centres of incipient insurrection; and at last, like wretched bears, which dance only because the ground they stand on is made too hot for endurance, the borough-mongers, and nominees, and parasites who filled the benches of Parliament, consented to follow Lord John Russell, only to avoid civil war. Yet even then, it is well known the Lords held out, and nothing brought them to

* Rogers' "Six Centuries of Work and Wages," p. 494.

reason but the fearful threat of deluging their House with plebeian parvenus by royal prerogative. What was not yielded to avert the terrible curse of domestic bloodshed was conceded at once to prevent nobility being vulgarised. And thus we see that while the causes of reform are democratic self-respect, intolerance of injustice, peaceful aspiration, and political education among a people, its hindrances are the deceptions of sectional prosperity, popular ignorance, the distractions of war, want of organisation, and an oligarchy blind and deaf to everything but privilege.



LECTURE III.

THE RELATION OF POLITICAL REFORM TO SOCIAL PROGRESS.

THE promoters of the great Reform Bill believed that they were ushering in the golden age. And so they were, in one sense, but not exactly as they intended it. For amongst the indirect consequences of that measure of political regeneration, certainly the most palpable and striking was the removal of restrictions on trade and commerce. This release of commerce followed just upon an enormous development of mechanical invention, and coincided with a large extension of markets in America, Asia, and Africa. The result was such a sudden expansion of trade, and such a rapid accumulation of wealth, as the world has never seen before, and will probably never see again. For instance, those born in the fateful year 1832 have seen the exports and imports of this country multiplied at least fourfold during their own lifetime. What the expansion of capital has been during that period may be imagined from the extension of foreign trade. For, while the population has doubled, our manufacturers, besides keeping pace with an enormously increased home demand, have choked every port in the world with their products; and now they are lamenting, like Alexander, that there are no more worlds to conquer.

We hear much grumbling about depression of trade just at present. But on the whole I suppose there never was a

half century in human experience that afforded such a happy time for capital combined with industry and enterprise. The favoured few, who knew where to tap the golden stream, have not only received a maximum of profit with a mimimum of toil and anxiety, but they have lived in an age when money could procure for them an enjoyment of life far longer, far more various, and far more refined than was ever possible to successful industry before. The four quarters of the earth have invited them to travel for amusement. The ocean has obsequiously bent beneath their yachts—each as costly as a king's navy in old times. Science has unfolded the secrets of nature for their delectation, has turned Alps and Andes into a museum of geology for them, and converted the deserts of the earth into a vast zoological garden for their instruction, or a park for their sport. Art has inspired a series of painters not disdained even by Mr. Ruskin; and all their masterpieces have been at the command of the millionaire. Or if a man had nobler aspirations still, and found delight in doing good, the more complex life of our time has opened out a hundred lines of public service, in all of which money and leisure have trebled the value of individual powers. As leaders of agitations, as presidents of societies, as layers of foundation stones, as members of Parliament, successful men of business have never been so much in request since the world began. There never was any other age in the past, and I strongly suspect there never will be another in the future, so desirable as the lifetime of the money-making man. And this characteristic of the age may be traced in no inconsiderable degree to the Reform Bill. For this gave the management of

affairs into the hands of capitalists precisely at the juncture when steam-power and extended markets enabled them to make the most of their opportunity. In that sense, indeed, our fathers were right when they believed that the triumph of reform ushered in a golden age.

But, unfortunately, there is another side to the picture. For while the past fifty years have been such an uncommonly happy time for the rich, it is impossible to say so much for the poor. It would be natural to suppose that so vast an influx of wealth would sweep away all pauperism. But so far is this from being the case, that on January 1, 1883, the number of paupers in England and Wales alone was, as nearly as possible, 800,000; and of these more than 100,000 were adult, able-bodied men and women. For the maintenance or relief of these people more than £8,000,000 was spent, after being wrung from a population of whom at least two or three millions were themselves on the verge of pauperism every day of their lives. Out of the thirty-six millions, or thereabout, forming the population of the United Kingdom, six-sevenths, or thirty millions, have so narrow a margin between income and the necessities of bare sustenance, that they cannot pay the annual cost of their children's education, and are obliged to have it spread through all their lives by means of rates and taxes. Prof. Rogers, M.P., in his "Six Centuries of Work and Wages," gives accumulated proofs that the earnings of labour, if measured by their purchasing power, are not, on the average, so good now as they were in the fifteenth century. Of course the case of highly skilled artisans is exceptional. But they are so few compared with the vast mass of the population that the average

remains as stated. The shameful squalor in which myriads live under the very shadow of palaces has been the cause of emotions that remind us too much of the proverb, "Much cry and little wool."

But what is this new horror accidentally revealed to us by inquiries resulting from the maudlin cant about "over-pressure" in A B C? Thousands of children, we are told, come breakfastless to school, and hundreds of thousands go for days without any more substantial dinner than bread and dripping. But what are we to think of the infatuated folly which urges this misery as a reason for keeping them in ignorance, and depriving them of the only hope of their redemption? Through ignorance their ancestors for a hundred generations have been the blind sport of accident. Through ignorance their forerunners could raise no effective protest when labour guilds were plundered, when the coin that paid their wages was debased, when the price of labour was fixed by authority, when cruel laws of settlement were passed, and destitute wanderers branded or even hanged as criminals. Through ignorance the forefathers of present day wretchedness could offer no resistance while lordly tenures were turned into ownership, and servile tenures were exchanged for more servile tenancies, or wholly abolished. Common pasture might be stolen, common lands distributed to titled greed, and game laws might be increased in stringency till land became worth more for sport than for labour; but the ignorance of the many was helpless, where the keen foresight of the few foresaw the land famine of to-day.

But ignorance does not kill outright. When agonised

by the misery it causes, we might almost wish it did. No; it tends to thriftless, heedless, senseless multiplication. The parents of these hungry children stumbled through ignorance into marriage. In the stupidity of ignorance they multiplied mouths when there was no prospect of food for them. The poor little ragged, pining creatures themselves are the embodiment and illustration of all the miseries and wrongs wrought by ignorance amongst the many. And the superfine philanthropy of doctors and enemies to school boards tells us, for pity's sake, to keep them ignorant still. Alas, it is not the wicked only whose "tender mercies are cruel." Why do they not rather propose some euthanasia? Better death, and silence, and rest, than the pauper's life of periodic torture and everlasting shame. Better death; for there the rich and poor meet together, and the horrible inequalities of an unnatural life are annulled; there the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. But if you keep them alive, teach them! In God's name teach them; and not grudgingly, but largely, liberally, in heart and soul, as well as in head; not as parrots, but as little brethren of Shakespeare and Milton—aye, of Christ! Teach them, I say, in free schools, in well-appointed, costly schools, and with all the best appliances that money can buy, even if you have to pawn all the guns and bayonets in every armoury of the land. The whole future of the civilised world is locked up in the wizened faces and pinched hearts of these victims of ignorance.

Forgive the digression; for I feel a touch of madness when I think of those who, because children's bodies are

starved, think to mend matters by starving their minds. Feed them by all means. So many of their parents have gone far beyond any possibility of fresh degradation through charity, that it is really not worth while raising objections on that score. But what does amaze me in the philanthropic doctors and their allies, is their stolid insensibility to the grim humour of the position. Here is a nation which began to reform itself half-a-century ago, and did it so effectually that Crœsus was a pauper compared with the British Government at the present day. Yet when we want to teach the nation's children in this age of gold, we find that hundreds of thousands among their parents cannot afford to give them a dinner. What is the worth of political reform that leaves untouched social miseries such as these?

But this is not the only illustration of the difference between promise and performance in the history of political reform. We have seen that the Act of 1832 was regarded as bringing the practice of the constitution into conformity with its theory. The theory, as held in the past, has been that while the main framework of our glorious constitution in Church and State is taken for granted—indeed, assumed to be part of the order of nature—our institutions in detail have been supposed to be moulded and directed by public opinion operating through Parliament. For reasons amply set forth in a petition mentioned in the last lecture, the House of Commons had long ceased to fulfil its function as the organ of public opinion, and consequently the working of the constitution was choked with abuses. The change made in 1832 was thought to be revolutionary in its

vastness, and while the timid expected the throne, the church, and the ten commandments to disappear in a whirlwind, the hopeful looked for a new heaven and a new earth dominated by reason and right. But things in general showed a tenacious conservatism equally unexpected by both the fearful and the sanguine. Parliamentary reform was necessarily and speedily followed by the reform of municipal corporations. But it was fourteen years before the repeal of the Corn Laws was carried, with the results we have described. Beyond these there were few great and vital improvements made in our laws for many years. And in particular, all forms of social injustice showed a remarkable tenacity of life.

Take for instance ecclesiastical law. The Marriage and Registration Acts, relieving Nonconformists from the inconveniences they suffered by going to their own places of worship for marriage or baptism, were certainly a great concession, and were passed in 1836. But it was not until 1855 that penalties were abolished for holding an assembly for worship in an unregistered room. It was 1858 before Jews were admitted to Parliament. It was not until 1868, and after the passing of a new Reform Bill, that church-rates ceased to be compulsory. And not until 1870, forty-eight years after the supposed era of popular emancipation, was the first general education Act in our national statutes passed into law.

Perhaps the case is still more striking if we turn to the laws affecting labour. Down to 1824 any combination whatever amongst workmen for the purpose of raising wages was treated as a conspiracy and punished accordingly. In that year the combination laws were abolished,

and the right of association asserted. But in the very next year this Act of relief was repealed, and another passed of a very specious character, but disastrous in its effects. For while avowedly renewing the sanction given in the previous year to combinations of workmen, it made association on any but the smallest scale both difficult and dangerous. Thus, it revived the common law on the subject of combinations obstructive to trade, and it excepted from penalty only those who were actually present at the meetings when the rate of wages was discussed. Thus a loophole was left for the re-entrance of the old tyrannical spirit, and no strike—indeed, no trades union—could be conducted without danger of prosecution. Now, when it is remembered how largely the reform unions of that period, and the secret associations for drill, and the incipient armies threatening to march on London, were composed of working men, it must have seemed inevitable that the passage of the Reform Bill should be followed by measures of full and adequate justice to workmen's associations. But nothing of the kind followed. Mr. George Howell—from whose valuable book on the Conflicts of Capital and Labour I glean these facts—tells us that—

"From 1834 to 1842 a good deal was done in the way of further organisation; occasional protests were from time to time made against the administration of the law, but there was no positive demand for its alteration. In 1842, and again in 1845, there were numerous strikes, and with them, almost as a matter of course, there came prosecutions, and protests against the administration of the law. In nearly every case these were directed against

the use which was made of the common law of conspiracy, by which the masters endeavoured to reach not only the perpetrators of unlawful acts, but also the committees of the several unions, and in every case to extend the punishment beyond the term of three months as fixed by the statute law to two years under the common law."

Now the period referred to in this passage comprises the thirteen years immediately following on the Reform Act that was to set everything right. Yet we find workmen still debarred from the right of effective combination for a perfectly legitimate purpose. A scandalous instance of this occurred, as Mr. Howell tells us, only two years after the triumph of reform. Six Dorchester labourers had committed the unpardonable offence of urging their mates to combine for their own protection. So much the law permitted, as we have seen, provided that their proceedings affected none except the men actually present when any binding resolution was agreed to. But means were found of getting these poor men condemned for administering unlawful oaths; and they were actually sentenced to seven years' transportation. A great agitation was the result. A procession of 40,000 workmen carried to Lord Melbourne a petition on their behalf with more than a quarter-of-a-million signatures. But meantime the poor wretches had been hustled on board ship, and, after the horrors of the "middle passage," were sold as slaves in Australia at a pound a head. They were graciously pardoned, it is true. But the period of their sentence had nearly expired before some of them heard of it. This, it may be urged, was an exceptional incident; and no

doubt it was the worst case of the kind. But it sounds incredible that the state of the law, making such an outrage possible, remained practically unaltered for thirty-five years after the Reform Act; that is, until 1867. The coincidence of the date with that of the second Reform Bill, will suggest that the impending emancipation of the workmen in towns had something to do with the improvement then made by the Master and Servants Act. But that is scarcely probable. For so far as the franchise operates on such matters at all—a question we shall consider presently—it operates *after* the oppressed have received a vote, and not before.

The obstacles to fair and open action on the part of Trades Unions had the usual effect of begetting unfair and underhand conspiracies. The occurrence of mysterious outrages in Sheffield and Manchester led to one of the most drastic and searching Commissions of enquiry ever held in this country. And the discoveries made by this Commission excited horror everywhere. It was proved that in Sheffield, and to a more limited extent in Manchester, mischief, outrage, and murder were systematically used by secret tribunals for the purpose of enforcing the decrees, not of any wide organisation, but of a little savage clique of conspirators. Then a fierce cry was raised for a Coercion Act against Trades Unions. They were to be swept off the face of the earth as satanic, and, still worse, as un-English inventions. All the wiseacres, who thought the disclosures a timely revelation of what democracy would bring us to, confidently expected the Commissioners to advise very strong measures. At the time when the Masters and Servants Act was passed the

Commission was only beginning its work. But the feeling of uneasiness caused by these outrages had existed for years, and had much to do with the attention given to the subject. Sensible men maintained that the evils deplored were the results of secrecy resulting from arbitrary repression. The Masters and Servants Act was partly the consequence of this feeling. But the horrible revelations that followed appeared to stamp it as a weak concession to crime. The Commissioners, however, were men of a judicial temper. They observed that the evidence of outrage was confined almost entirely to two places, and they came to the conclusion that increased liberty combined with a more effective criminal law, would be a better remedy than any suggested by shrieking reactionaries. The result was the law of 1871, which, to their credit be it spoken, a Conservative Government farther improved in 1875.

I have said amply enough now to illustrate my point, that there is an enormous difference between promise and performance in the history of political reform. We have now to ask the reason of it, and what hope there is of any improvement in the case of the new measure of reform on which Parliament is engaged at present. In that entertaining and remarkable novel entitled "All Sorts and Conditions of Men," a considerable portion of the plot is connected with the Radical Club in Redman's Row. The hero of the story takes part in the debates of this club, and, of course, always has much the best of the argument. Among other things, he tells his fellow members that they are great fools to trouble themselves about the House of Lords, or the State Church, or the conflicts of parties.

What they want is better houses, unadulterated food and drink, purer amusements, in a word, a richer and higher and brighter life. This, he says, they can get if they determine to have it; but he does not exactly tell them how. He only says that they are wasting their time in wrangling about political institutions. Now, at first sight, our reflections so far would seem to justify the novelist. For we have been insisting that so far as social justice and reasonable equality are concerned, the effects of political reform have fallen far short of what might have been expected. Still it must be acknowledged that without political reform, we should at the present day have been in an almost infinitely worse condition than we are. Without the aid of the ten-pound voter even the Irish famine would not have permanently broken down the corn laws. Without household suffrage, we should not to the end of the century have obtained even an approximation to a common school system. These two measures alone, to say nothing of the Irish Land Act, are sufficient to justify us in attaching great value to a reform in representation. But it is my business at present to show, if I can, why it is that we have not got much more.

The reasons for this, I believe, to be partly political and partly social. The political reasons are two; in the first place, Parliamentary reform has never been carried far enough; and, in the next, our oligarchic system is so deeply rooted that, even when exposed unsheltered to the assaults of democracy, it repels them. And the social reasons are three—ignorance, habit, and a low moral tone. In the present and succeeding lecture, I shall be concerned mainly with the political reasons. In the two

concluding lectures, although the social obstacles to the full fruition of reform will not be my main subjects, yet they will be constantly kept in view.

I affirm, then, that parliamentary reform has never been carried far enough to secure the utmost practicable redress of contemporary abuses. Are you not amazed that, after all the storm and struggle preceding 1832, after the mutterings of a social earthquake, and the immediate imminence of civil war, the agitators should have been satisfied with the enfranchisement of 500,000 comfortable and well-to-do householders, while the miserable were left powerless as ever? Can you conceive now the political feeling of a generation which thought it a glorious victory to secure for Manchester a voice as potent as those of Woodstock and Eye combined? That after the long delays on which we have previously commented, and after the promulgation of ideas more advanced than have ever been realised yet, our fathers should have been satisfied with such a stop-gap as the Act of 1832 is a paradox strikingly illustrative of the British love for compromise. Now that affection is often an advantage; but it is almost as often a disadvantage and a weakness. Which it was in 1832 I shall not take on me to decide. In previous lectures I have urged in defence of the settlement that the alternative was civil war. Perhaps it would have been better to have said that the alternative lay between civil war of a sharp, short, violent kind and civil war of a slow, wearing and tedious character. On the whole our fathers were no doubt right to choose the latter. But we cannot help sometimes wishing that they had made a push for household suffrage then. However, they did not; and

the result was that, though the absolute predominance of the landed interest came to an end, the oligarchy in which it was vested was not succeeded by democracy. What happened was this: the commercial and manufacturing aristocracy received a considerable accession of power, by which they were able to break down restrictions on trade. The enfranchisement of the ten-pound householder in towns gave a very considerable leverage to that section of the community whose interest lay in the most unrestricted and advantageous employment of capital. Spinners and manufacturers, engineers and machinists, overlookers, foremen, skilled workmen, with all the thousands of shop-keepers engaged in supplying their wants, constituted a formidable political army; and when led by men of conspicuous genius, and untiring energy, in a movement palpably justified by the needs of the whole community, they were resistless. But even the giants of those days, when they tried their strength in other directions, proved comparatively powerless. They could not stop the madness of the Crimean War. They could not appease the unreasoning passion that smashed the crockery of the Chinese Emperor's summer palace. They could not persuade Parliament that robbery by Irish landlords meant conspiracy and murder by tenants. When they denounced the land monopoly and the game laws, they were as a voice crying in the wilderness and regarded by none. They could not secure national education, though I remember hearing Mr. Cobden press it with all the piercing force of his practical logic. Indeed it was a common sneer amongst the resting and thankful Whigs, that the leaders who had carried Free Trade were men of

one idea, and could do nothing else. But the reason was evident. It lay in no defect of the leaders. It lay in the nature of the franchise of 1832. For that was essentially a commercial franchise, and comparatively ineffective, save where the interests of trade and working capital were obviously concerned.

Do not suppose that in this argument I imply any special reproach against the classes enfranchised in 1832. When condemning the subjection of the nation to an hereditary oligarchy, I have never spoken of the men comprising that privileged class as worse than others in natural disposition. Nor do I now insinuate that the commercial aristocracy are more self-seeking, or less desirous of the general welfare, than the millions socially below them. If I were betrayed into such a charge, facts, the most brilliant and eloquent, would convict me of ungenerous slander. The names of William Brown, Francis Crossley, Titus Salt, Isaac Holden, Alfred Illingworth, Thomas Potter, and a hundred others that might be mentioned, are not representative of a miserly grasping class, bent only on profit grinding. In a score of flourishing towns, public parks, and free libraries, and model dwellings, and mechanics' institutes, are solid monuments, not of the liberality only, but of the wise, far-seeing philanthropy of this class. To this very class, indeed, we owe the most prominent radical statesmen of the coming time. Yet still, for all that, it stands good that the politics of average man in any class, whether that of landowners or traders, will necessarily be moulded by the ideas, habits, and hopes and fears most familiar to them. And those who are the most anxious to be disinterested are

usually the first to confess how difficult it is to be so. It is, therefore, perfectly consistent with the highest appreciation of the trading and commercial aristocracy to suggest that they would naturally be inclined to regard Free Trade as the one cure for all social ills, and indisposed to allow sufficient importance to other and possibly larger issues. So it came to pass that while, under the franchise of 1832, everything was done to encourage trade, there was not sufficient voting power to support radical reforms in regard to education, land, church, or foreign policy.

This view is confirmed by the fact that the enactment of household suffrage for borough constituencies in 1867 was very speedily followed by a vigorous attack on the more pressing social problems that had been neglected under a narrower suffrage. Incidents of our own experience make a deeper impression upon us than any historic records. And hence I have referred more than once, perhaps in the hearing of some here present, to one of the most remarkable instances of fulfilled prophecy within my observation. For I very well remember hearing Mr. Bright declare in public, several years before 1867, that not more than three years would elapse after the enactment of Household Suffrage before a complete measure of national elementary education would be passed through Parliament. I cannot fix the precise date, for I made no note at the time, but I have the words ringing in my ears still; and I know by certain chronological landmarks of my own history that it must have been before household suffrage was within the range of practical politics. Well, that extension of popular power was made in 1867, and

in 1870 the Elementary Education Act was passed, and the principle of compulsion established by general, if not universal, consent. This was accompanied by the removal of that crying scandal, the Protestant Establishment in Ireland. Headway has also been made more slowly, though still decisively, against an unjust land system. And, for the first time in our history, earnest efforts have been made, as already mentioned, to put employers and employed on a footing of entire equality before the law.

Sometimes, when we call attention to such results of an extended suffrage, we are assured that they are entirely accidental, and of no weight sufficient to remove the inherent absurdity of expecting enlightened legislation from the uneducated many. No matter what the facts of experience may be, your theorist is always ready to explain them away, while he falls back upon the incontrovertible principle that the political ideas of the educated few ought to be better than those of the ignorant multitude. Unquestionably they *ought*. But as a matter of experience *are* they so? I imagine that it would not be unfair to take such ably conducted journals as the *Times* and the *Saturday Review* to be exponents of the political doctrines in favour with the "upper ten thousand," to whose training the universities have until quite recently been mainly devoted, and who yet enjoy a monopoly of the great public schools. Now a file of these journals is simply a museum of exploded fallacies, of confident predictions put to shame by facts, of anachronisms in thought and sentiment, of ancient barbarisms dressed out in the refinements of modern culture. If anyone loves the Sopho-

clean irony which consists in the grim incongruity of unrecognised facts with the passion of heroic utterance, let him read again the lofty eloquence, only possible to conscious infallibility, with which *Saturday Reviewers* demonstrated the certainty of the slaveholders' triumph and the inevitable bankruptcy of the American Union. On the other hand, it is a familiar political experience that matters hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed to babes. The Chartists were not as a general rule highly educated men, but they have proved to be the educators of our great statesmen, and, after adopting their ideas about the ballot, we are now within a measurable distance of others, such as manhood suffrage and equal electoral districts.

But it would be utterly absurd to draw from facts like these the inference that ignorance is favourable to political liberalism. Take two men, the one a real scholar, with a knowledge of man and nature rather than of words, the other an ignorant boor; suppose them separated from all disturbing influences, such as fear for institutions in the case of the scholar, or hunger and craving on the part of the boor; and undoubtedly the educated man would be an idealising Liberal, and the boor a crass Conservative. But in politics we have not to deal thus with individual, isolated men. We have to do with multitudes ranged in more or less definite sections. Now, the object of politics is the common good, not the advantage of sections. But human nature being what it is, if power be concentrated in the hands of any one section, the common good is too much identified with the prosperity of that section. On the other hand, if power is distributed among all, the conflict of

supposed interests issues in a general compromise roughly identical with the common good. Hence, so long as any constituent part of the community is excluded from power, the resulting policy is sure to lack universality. Thus, for instance, I cannot doubt that the exclusion of the agricultural labourers has been one chief cause of Conservative success in staving off the land question. I do not expect that their opinions on this or any other subject will ripen very quickly. But I cannot conceive it possible that two million men, of whom the majority depend for their livelihood on land as their raw material, will tolerate for ten years the laws which make that land a mere luxury of the rich. And this is another illustration, if more were needed, of the prevention of social progress by a want of thoroughness in political reforms.

I may, however, be reminded that the fears still haunting Conservative minds about the recent Franchise Bill are perfectly consistent with the argument just now urged as to the dependence of the common good on a fair distribution of political power. For it is often insisted that the class now enfranchised, if allied with the poorer householders in the towns, will outnumber all the other sections of the population, and swamp them by their votes. But this, it is added, means that all national policy is to be moulded in the interest of one section alone. When I hear talk of this kind I am reminded of a remark once made to me by a great master of science during a discussion in a certain School Board, on which we both at that time had seats. The subject was some phase of the "religious difficulty," and denominational speakers natu-

rally identified their own opinions with Christianity, while they treated the Catholic Church as a sectional heresy. "This amuses me," said the learned professor; "it is as if a little creek in the shore were to condemn the arrogance of the ocean in assuming to itself an undue share in the control of the tides." Now it is surely as incongruous to treat the vast majority of the nation as a section of the community, or to speak of its predominance as that of selfish interests.

We have seen that at least six-sevenths of the nation live so much from hand to mouth that it is admitted they cannot, out of current income, pay the real cost of education. Surely it is ridiculous to speak of such a large majority as a mere section. They are not the whole nation of course, but they are so nearly this that we may well consider their voice as equivalent to that of the nation. If, therefore, their votes were really to swamp the remaining minority, it would be more likely that the common good should be thus secured than by the reverse process, with which we are familiar, of the minority swamping *them*. But it is altogether a false assumption to suppose that these millions are a homogeneous mass, all animated by one mind. In one respect, indeed, they are so. Having so little property or privilege to defend, their only hope lies in the predominance of the common good; and therefore they may all be expected to agree in hostility to monopolists, or one-sided laws and customs contrary to the general interest. But, when we come to consider special schemes for new social arrangements, there is as much difference amongst them as there is amongst the select minority of their "betters." They are as much aware

of their interest in the preservation of order and in the defence of legitimate property as the richest can be. And they may safely be trusted to assess the practical value of institutions, offices, and orders. They are not in the least likely to dissipate or squander the accumulated wealth by which learning and charity are endowed. But it is very likely indeed that they will protest against its being wasted on comfortable sinecures and ceremonial pomp. We may, therefore, hail the ascendency of the million not only without fear, but with confidence that their action will speedily prove what political reform can do for social progress.

Perhaps the only considerable danger of still farther disappointment lies in the possibility of a successful appeal by Democratic Toryism to the indolence, self-indulgence, and servility always inherent in our common humanity. In speaking formerly of "The Sources of Popular Enthusiasm,"* it was necessary to point out that "popular favour may always be gained, at any rate for a time, by appealing to men's worse nature, as well as by arousing their better." And this accounts for the frantic applause often evoked by a sanguinary policy in foreign affairs. On the same principle a domestic policy that favours laziness and gratifies momentary appetite is sometimes more attractive to the multitude than any summons to a higher life conditional on exertion and self-denial. Thus, what I may call a policy of doles has often diverted the multitude from insisting on a policy of justice. And that is the chief danger to be apprehended now. There are signs of it in

* "Lessons from the Rise and Fall of the English Commonwealth," Lecture V.

the line adopted by many Tory orators when dealing with social problems. For while they are strongly opposed to the disendowment of the Church, to the overthrow of the land monopoly, and to the abolition of the game laws, they are very ready to provide labourers' dwellings at the public expense, they advocate emigration at the cost of the Government, and they are generous in the distribution of coals and blankets. There are some of them who, under the pretext of fair trade, are ready to impose a poor rate on all consumers to support the distressed capitalists and operatives of any depressed industry.

But perhaps the truest test of an inclination to a policy of doles, instead of a policy of justice, is afforded by a man's views about public elementary education. For it is a curious fact that Democratic Tories who advocate rate-sustained dwellings and pauperising charity in the form of free food and clothing, most commonly draw the line at free schools. The very same people who insist on relieving parents from the responsibility for feeding their hungry children, will repudiate free schools as the first step towards communism. But there is method in this madness. For free schools would do more than anything else to make the ignorant multitude masters of their own destinies. And although I do not for a moment suggest that the good people I am criticising would consciously adopt this as an objection to free schools, yet the real motive is only the same thing disguised. For free schools would either destroy sectarian education altogether, or reduce it to its proper place as the crotchet of a small minority. And this process would be very perilous to a good many forms of parochial patronage. It would

make the multitude more independent; and many pious philanthropists are of opinion that the people are too independent already. But this is the very reason why some of us, who generally condemn both communism and pauperising charity, are yet most eager for a universal system of free schools, open to all classes alike. We say it is the one form of communism that tends to cultivate character, energy, and enterprise. We want free schools because we are convinced that, after we have had them for a generation, the multitude will be able to take care of themselves. In fact, it is precisely because we are in favour of a policy of justice, and not of a policy of doles, that we insist on a free and generous education, fitting the people to do justice to themselves.

On the other hand, how common it is to hear a cry of spoliation, confiscation, communism, and nihilism raised against Radical statesmen because they suggest freer access for everyone to the land, and the protection of industry against landlordism! Such men are compared to Jack Cade in his appeals to vulgar greed, and scolded for exciting popular cupidity. But surely these invectives are strangely incongruous from men whose one plea with the people is that they should "open their mouths, and shut their eyes, and see what Heaven will send them." All that the Radical statesman offers is better opportunity for hard work. Access to the land is not of the least use to a man too lazy to dig; and security for the fruits of industry is only of value to the industrious. Here, in fact, is the great distinction between the Radical policy of justice and the Tory Democrat's policy of doles. The policy of justice would remove obstacles to industry, and

stimulate men to exertion. The policy of doles would leave industry hampered as it is in the interest of patronage and sport, but would keep down discontent by the unearned gifts of charity. The new Democracy will have to choose between these two; and I pray Heaven they may choose aright.

Yet let us not expect too much. We shall have no sweeping changes, no swift revolution. The British oligarchy holds its powers by other sanctions than those of a limited franchise. Our lords, and squires, and parsons are far from perfect; but they have never been so anti-human as the pre-revolutionary French nobility. Leave them their precious system of the three profits, with the three orders, landlord, tenant-at-will, landless labourer, and you shall usually have no fault to find with their perfection of manner, their genial courtesy, their free-handed charity. Our cotton lords, our iron kings, and golden dustmen are a little stiffer in the joints, and—if I may be pardoned the word—stand-offish in manner. But their system of capital and labour, profits and wages, high pressure, and quick returns on lowest market rates, has so wrought itself into the machinery of our life, and into the prime conceptions of our manufacturing population, that new ideas about the distribution of wealth are likely to be of very slow growth. Yet I am not one of those who are impatient of British conservatism. The coach of state has a tremendous hill to get down before it reaches the level of equality. And I shall not complain of the shrieking and smoke caused by brakes and drags, provided only that they do not bring about a dead-lock.

LECTURE IV.

THE LAND MONOPOLY.

In the three preceding lectures we have traced the main causes which, notwithstanding the democratic temper and traditions of our race, made government by oligarchy an inevitable phase in our history. We have also seen how the revolt of the many against the few has been moderated and softened into a course of gradual political change. We have finally observed that changes in political forms have been very far indeed from improving, as much as was expected, the social condition of the people. We have found one reason for this in the fact that political reforms have never until now been carried far enough to make the people masters of their own destinies, except on condition of such general excitement and passionate resolve as ought not to be required. But we have also acknowledged that there are other reasons for our disappointment. For the position of the oligarchy is so firmly rooted in the constitution of society, that even the most extensive political changes do not materially affect it. And, on the other hand, amongst the million, ignorance, prejudice, spiritless indolence, and a low moral tone make many the dupes now of purse-proud patrons, now of impracticable dreamers, and again, of self-seeking adventurers. All such influences are against the common good.

But if the million are thus blinded to their best interests

the fault lies much more in circumstances than in personal character. "Much more," I say; not that I forget the importance of personal character, or would undervalue individual responsibility. I shall not dispute for an instant that if every man in our industrial army and among its destitute stragglers were a saint and a hero, a beneficient revolution would be accomplished in twelve months. And the fact that they are not, as a general rule, saints and heroes, is very properly a subject of regret, mingled with reproach. To this extent, and in this sense, we may rightly admit that our social miseries are caused by defects of character. But taking men as we know them, generally inclined to good, but not very eager about it, and more fond of pleasure than of work, common sense teaches that favourable surroundings are necessary to keep them right, and that average character will go wrong if circumstances are adverse.

In trying to influence individuals, we have a right to assume that every man will strive to be above the average, and to overcome circumstance. Every one whom we can inspire with this ambition is a hero won for the army of progress. But in dealing with the masses and their prospects, we dare not take this course. Dependence on such a slow process of redemption would drive us to despair. We must change circumstances if we would save the world. And yet the only powers at our disposal for this enterprise of changing circumstance are the million, whom circumstances make what they are Reflection on this truth may well prevent Radicals from being over sanguine; but it should also make them the more earnest. For thousands of years cir-

cumstance and institutions have conspired to deprive the multitude not only of outward fortune, but also of the capacity for well-directed aspiration. Hence, the Nihilists cry "Destroy all institutions, and let us begin afresh!" But we say no; for that would be to sacrifice the hard-won experience of ten thousand years; and from the barbaric chaos thus created, you would have to start once more on the weary pilgrimage through all the stages of savagery, communism, feudalism, and I know not what, through which we have laboriously reached our present position. No; do not destroy; but make a valiant effort to change; —an effort impelled and guided by the discovery of the present generation, that political reform is of no use except as a lever to bring about organic change in our social conditions.

I know nothing more indicative of the oligarchic spirit, than the glibness with which successful and so-called practical men will meet all your complaints of social injustice with the heartless refrain that "the chances are the same for all." Here are two boys born in neighbouring cottages, and brought up under precisely the same village influences. The one becomes a railway contractor and a millionaire, the other a cadger, a drunkard, and a pauper. What would you have? The chances are the same for all. Of two boys attending on the same plough, one emigrates and becomes a great sheep farmer in Australia. The other turns poacher, is sent to prison, and comes out a criminal ready for felony. You may pity him and admire his brother, but the chances are the same for all. Throughout the thronging population that crowds the land ceaseless currents are flowing, as marked and

constant as those of the ocean. From every village there is a drain of human life to the squalor of our large towns, as perpetual as the descent of pure mountain rills to the shameful filth of our great rivers. But that is not the only current. From the dark places of labour and suffering, energetic souls force their way to the light of prosperity; and, on the other hand, from the high places of fortune, indolence, extravagance and dissipation draw their victims into the haunts of destitution. Is it not just? The chances are the same for all. And so, whatever you may urge as to the concentration of wealth and the diffusion of poverty, it will wring from your successful master of fortune nothing more than an acknowledgment that the world *is* hard for those who do not know how to manage it; but, he will add, the chances are the same for all.

Now, here I join issue. It is not accurate to say that the chances are the same for all, except in this sense, that we all live in the same world. For the conditions of society may be so weighted as to give a special premium, not sanctioned by justice, to exceptional character and ability. If food, for instance, were made the prize of a three-mile race, it would not be true to say that the chances were the same for all. They are not; they are in favour, and disproportionately in favour, of the longest legs and the largest lungs. I say disproportionately, because in prescribing the progress of man, nature has not assigned such a value to legs and lungs as to make the right to live dependent on their superiority. But the case is very much the same in principle, if all conditions, for instance, are disproportionately in favour of parsimony, cool blood, exceptional endurance, or specula-

tive genius. Society cannot be justly constituted, unless, on the whole, it is favourable to an equable diffusion of comfort, knowledge and refinement amongst average men. Now, that society as we know it is actually so constituted will scarcely be maintained by anyone, Tory or Radical, Christian or Positivist.

I suppose that no part of Mr. Henry George's "Progress and Poverty" secured more general assent than his description of the evils uniformly attendant on the highest forms of modern civilisation. People may differ as to his proposed remedy; but as to the existence of the disease, any hesitation to admit it is scarcely consistent with candour, or, indeed, with sanity. It is of no use to tell us that poverty is an inevitable accident of progress. Exceptional poverty may be so; but not the existence of a million paupers. It is of no avail to sneer at impossible dreams of equality. Equality is not now in question, but only reasonable comfort. Let any one answer this as he would have it answered in his own case. Does reasonable comfort exist where the slightest raising of the standard of subsistence must destroy the balance between income and expenditure? Suppose a change of manners and ideas should add to necessary subsistence, as ordinarily reckoned, some article of refinement or decency, costing, say, three shillings a week: could it be fairly held that reasonable comfort was general, if it were proved that six-sevenths of the population were incapable of that expenditure? In the story of the French Revolution we hear a good deal about the *sans-culottes,* — destitute people who went without breeches for the simple reason that they could not afford

to buy them. True, they were used to it. They inherited squalid traditions, according to which breeches were unnecessary. But when different fashions came in, and a higher standard of decency was established, surely the fact that these poor wretches could not, by reason of poverty, adopt it, afforded a presumption that reasonable comfort did not prevail amongst them. On the same principle, I insist that the necessity for state-paid education, proves the absence of reasonable comfort amongst six-sevenths of our own population. In days gone by, our intellectual *sans-culottes* never dreamed of elementary education as a necessary of life. And when public opinion made it so, it was found that they could not afford it. This slight addition to the standard of subsistence (amounting, on an average, to probably three shillings a week) could not be made without calling in the assistance of rates and taxes for six-sevenths of the people.* If any

* This may seem like a condemnation of state education ; but what is really condemned is the unequal and one-sided distribution of wealth which has made it necessary. I have never concealed from myself that if every parent could have afforded to pay the whole cost of his children's schooling, state education would have been unnecessary, and open to all Mr. Herbert Spencer's objections. But it *is* necessary, imperatively necessary. The morbid distortion of progress has made it so. And now the one thing needful is to make it effectual, by abolishing fees, which, directly and indirectly, cost far more than they are worth. I must also guard myself against another possible misunderstanding. I have elsewhere often argued that poor parents do, *in the long run*, pay, through their rates and taxes, the greater part—in some cases the whole—of the cost of schooling. But then the cost is spread over the whole of their lives as ratepayers, perhaps forty or fifty years. This contention is quite consistent with the allegation in the text—that they cannot afford an additional three shillings a week out of current income.

apology is needed for my constant reiteration of this fact, I must plead the difficulty of getting it appreciated. We are so accustomed to rates in aid that we do not reflect what they mean. To my own mind, this acknowledged inability of so large a proportion of our fellow-countrymen is proof demonstrative of the extensive absence of reasonable comfort. Surely such a state of things as this is not to be accounted for by defects of individual character. Nor can it be justified by the fallacy that the chances are the same for all. It indicates, rather, a false, ill-balanced constitution of society. It suggests that the chances are weighted, as in the tables of a gaming-house, so that fortune inevitably gravitates to a few.

The question thus raised is a very complicated one, and I have not the presumption to suppose I can give a complete solution. But there are two causes of social injustice that seem to me so plain and palpable as to require instant consideration, not from us only, but from the whole nation. I refer to the land monopoly, and also to the present apportionment of the profits arising from production. Our immediate concern is with the former: the latter will be considered when we come to speak of the distribution of wealth. But the land monopoly has a great deal to answer for, especially when we bear in mind the means necessary to maintain it. For it converts into a luxury of the few what is really the most necessary of all raw materials. It minimises the number of tillers of the soil; it lessens production; it maintains barbarous sports totally inconsistent with high cultivation. It tends to redundancy of population, and turns that redundancy into a curse. It drives into overcrowded markets the

children whom it produces. It depresses the standard of subsistence, and thus operates doubly to keep down wages. Over a great part of the country it creates a state of things in which it is positively no one's individual interest to improve the land. It robs the nation of a just revenue from the soil, and thus unfairly increases the burdens oppressing trade and commerce. Now, if this accusation can be made good, as I believe it can, surely we are justified in tracing no small part of our social disease to the land monopoly.

We are often told that the phrase is altogether an improper one. For "monopoly" means an exclusive right of sale vested in some favoured person or company. But there is no such exclusive right in the sale of land. Every one may legally buy and sell it, whenever he can get the chance, provided of course that he observes the form and conditions imposed by law. And this, no doubt, is true. Yet it is equally true that the forms and conditions, together with other restrictions imposed by law, operate practically to reduce to the lowest possible limits the number of men possessing territorial interests, influence, or power. And to such a condition of things the word monopoly may very properly be applied, if not in its original literal meaning, at least in an obvious sense very commonly understood.

The extent to which this monopoly prevails may be very easily disguised. Thus a return issued in 1873, gives the total number of landowners in Great Britain and Ireland as no less than 1,173,724. When we remember that the number of separate families in the three kingdoms cannot be much more than 7,000,000, it is, at first sight,

rather gratifying to find that about one-seventh of all the fathers of families would appear to be landowners. But our satisfaction is lessened when we find that in this return, individual and also corporate owners are multiplied by as many holdings as they happen to possess in separate districts. Thus, the estates of the ecclesiastical commissioners are counted as held by forty-nine owners, and the crown lands by an equal number. A noble Duke is returned as fourteen landowners. The same source of error exists in a great many other cases. But farther, every one is called a landowner who possesses the freehold of any building site, however small. In fact, out of nearly 1,200,000 alleged landowners, it turns out that upwards of 852,000 hold possession of less than one acre each. Now the whole area of the United Kingdom is more than 77,000,000 acres. Deduct 500,000—a fair allowance for the 852,000 owners with less than an acre each—and you have 76,500,000 acres to be allotted, with due allowance for commons, to the remaining 348,000 owners. The total amount of land still subject to common rights is probably little more than 2,500,000 acres. Deducting this, you have 500,000 acres at most, owned by 852,000 people; and, on the other hand, 74,000,000 acres owned by 348,000. Such a state of things is at least suggestive of something very like land monopoly.

But the case may be put more strongly still. The owners of about half the United Kingdom could probably be accommodated with seats in Exeter Hall. The area of England and Wales is a little over 37,000,000 acres, and as nearly as possible one quarter of this is in the hands of 874 men. The case of Ireland is

still worse; for 744 men possess nearly half of it. And Scotland is worst of all; for almost one quarter of it is comprised in the estates of twelve men; and about one-fourteenth of the whole of that ancient kingdom is now the domain of one nobleman. It would be absurd to suppose that this concentration of landed property in a few hands is the result of any natural and legitimate process. There must be in our history and laws some reason for this abnormal state of things; and I will first give my own opinion of what the causes have been, in order that we may be the better prepared to estimate its bearing upon the conflict of oligarchy and democracy.

In every settled and prosperous country of course the possession of land must confer some special advantages not offered by other forms of property. Its security is necessarily greater than that of gold or jewels. And if it does not rival commerce or manufacture in profits, it is at any rate generally increasing in value without any effort of the owner. In addition, it is usually considered, whether rightly or wrongly, a specially honourable form of property, and even where landownership is most widely diffused it confers the social consideration due to a settled and substantial citizen.

But certain features in the history of our country, as described in outline at the beginning of these lectures, have rendered the association specially strong between landed possessions and social dignity, as well as political power. For the feudal system was not in our country, as in most others, merged in the one all-absorbing despotism of the royal overlord. Even the Tudors did not succeed in bringing this about. And the revolt against the arrogant

incompetency of the Stuarts ended, not in a democracy, but in the substitution of a social for a military feudalism. The old baronage having been all but extirpated by its own violence, the new aristocracy sought to better the example by substituting a peaceful social domination for the old military rule. The position of the lord of a manor in the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century was one of very great local power, which he exercised without any of the vital risks that harassed the ambition of the old barons. As justice of the peace he administered the law, without much danger of inquiry as to his interpretation of it. He had special rights over all common lands, and sometimes stretched those rights at his pleasure. As owner of the village and its fields, he could compel everyone to obey his will on pain of banishment from the neighbourhood. He could dictate both the politics and the religion of all his tenants. His only equals were neighbouring magnates, and his assistance was sought at election times with much flattery and many promises by his superiors in the state. Farming had to be conducted with due regard to the interest of his lordship's sport. But if he thus entailed roughness and waste on agriculture, he was protected from loss, not only by the one-sided laws affecting landlord and tenant, but also by an almost prohibitory tax upon foreign importation of food. He was the ultimate heir of all the industry and enterprise of the neighbourhood. For whatever was done to improve the land or attract custom to the village, the ultimate profit gravitated into his pocket. If a farmer knocked a post into the ground it became the landlord's. If the poor man were fool enough to put in drains, or erect

a pump, or build a shed, he simply made a present to the landowner, who might turn him out on six months' notice, and keep his goods. Whatever creditor came short, the landlord was safe so long as he did not let arrears accumulate beyond the value of the tenant's furniture and stock. For if the farmer were bankrupt, the lord must first be satisfied in full, even though not a farthing was left for anyone else. When to this it is added that the landed gentry formed a caste amongst themselves, and looked on any contact with shopkeepers or commercial men as an American would regard an invitation to dine with a negro, we have said enough to suggest strong reasons for a very stiff Conservatism amongst the territorial gentry.

But Conservatism does not always mean simply keeping things as they are. Where the instinct of self-preservation is aroused in a privileged caste, there is no novelty which it will not sanction professedly for the prevention of change. Hence there are no revolutionists like your Tory demagogues, who, rather than concede equal rights, will pauperise a whole nation with doles. At the end of the seventeenth century new customs began to prevail in regard to the devolution of land, customs as disastrous as they were novel, but, like many other Conservative innovations, intended for the preservation of privilege. The law of primogeniture is, of course, as old as feudalism, and was perhaps justified by the necessity then existing for a territorial army. But for the preservation of the territorial social system of later times, the operation of primogeniture was found to be uncertain. Any spendthrift heir when he came into possession might sell the land, or, being made bankrupt, might

be deprived of it; and thus the family would lose its territorial position. This difficulty was met in part by the legal permission to entail estates, so that each successor should only be a tenant for life and not absolute owner. The obvious inconveniences to the public interest of such an arrangement were corrected by another provision enabling each "tenant in tail," as he came into possession, to execute a deed which, when enrolled in the Court of Chancery, constituted him owner of the fee simple. But such a provision exposed the continuity of territorial families to all the dangers just indicated. To meet this the system of settlement was invented, and came into vogue toward the end of the seventeenth century. The law does not allow any estate to be settled for a longer period than twenty-one years beyond the expiry of existing lives. But as each successive heir to an estate comes of age he can join the tenant for life, usually his own father, in cutting off the previous entail, and resettling the estate for his own life and twenty-one years afterwards. The settlement, usually includes arrangements providing a charge on the estate for the support of other members of the family. But its chief effect is to make the property inviolable for the lifetime of the heir in tail and twenty-one years afterwards. The heir and successor may be a spendthrift and a gambler hopelessly bankrupt. Yet that does not affect the continuity of the estate. The income may be sequestrated, and the hereditary mansion may be let. But nothing disturbs the settlement. The estate cannot be sold by the creditors, because it is not really the bankrupt's property. He is only a tenant for life. Thus the estate is kept together for the next heir in

tail, and he, if he marries a rich heiress, may restore all things as they were in the days of his forefathers, with the addition, probably, of many acres to his paternal inheritance.

Sometimes, if we speak of this practically unlimited power of settlement as a defect of the land laws, legal experts smile at our simplicity, and assure us that this power of settlement is not confined to land at all, but is equally applicable to stock or railway shares; and that as a matter of fact, it is constantly exercised in the case of heirlooms—such as pearls, or diamond necklaces, or ancient plate. Precisely. And with what object is the settlement made in such cases? Manifestly to keep the precious articles in the exclusive possession of one family, and to guard them against the ordinary vicissitudes of fortune. Now in regard to gold and jewels it is of little consequence to any one, save the creditors of a bankrupt heir, that such articles should be kept out of the market. But the case is very different with the land. Here the commonwealth is as directly interested as any creditors can be in maintaining freedom of trade. And therefore it is no defence whatever of settlement as applied to land, to say that it is equally applicable to other things. It does not do as much harm in the case of other things as it does in the case of land; and therefore we are perfectly justified in asking that its application to land may be more stringently limited.

It is obvious how these laws and customs bear upon the land monopoly. The national constitution, class traditions and social habits have long combined to exaggerate in this country the advantages everywhere attendant on

possession of land. These advantages have been precisely such as would naturally stimulate family pride and make the parting with an estate equivalent to extinction. No wonder, therefore, that careful provision has been made to prevent the dissipation of estates by their temporary holders. The general nature of that provision we have seen. Its effect has been, that while most of the usual courses of sale or partition have been barred, each great family that held out for half-a-dozen generations has had many opportunities, by intermarriage and otherwise, to increase its estates. But other reasons for accumulation exist. The cumbrous title-deeds, with their tiresome recitations, have been encouraged or necessitated by our territorial system, and have reacted so as to confine the possession of land for other than commercial purposes to the territorial hierarchy. And again, our traditional land system, with its game laws, its hunting raids, its want of security for farmers' investments, its stereotyped rotations of crops, and landlord dictation in general, has so kept down the returns from agricultural land that no one cares to have it, except for purposes of social ambition. None but a very rich man, or a man of daring enterprise combined with genius, can afford to hold agricultural land in England. This necessarily co-operates with all other mentioned causes to confirm the land monoply.

From this sketch the relation of these abuses to some of our social difficulties ought to be tolerably plain. And, first of all, I hope I have made clear what was meant by saying that these abuses convert into a luxury of the few what is really the most necessary of all raw materials. For, as we have seen, the absorption of land by our oligarchy is not

to be accounted for solely, nor even mainly, by greed of gain; but rather by social ambition. Landowners have often urged it as a merit that they are content with a return of 2½ per cent. on the capital supposed to be represented by their estates. But the fact is that they have taken out the other 2½ per cent. in sport, in patronage, in political influence, in ecclesiastical dictation, in local supremacy. In other words, the possession of agricultural land is not a business investment; it is a luxury which only the rich can afford. Now pray remember, that notwithstanding the enormous spread of manufactures, the part of our national territory assigned to agriculture, pasture, or sport is still enormously preponderant. And then ask yourselves whether in all your reading you have ever met with another instance of a nation making its domain practically the pleasure ground of a rich oligarchy?

Yes, there was something like it in ancient Italy when the Roman republic, gorged with conquest, degenerated into the Roman Empire. In the century preceding the Christian era there had been enormous accumulations of land in the possession of a few rich men, who cultivated it by hordes of slaves. In the Italy of that day, as in the England of this, poor men could hardly afford to hold land. There, as here, large sections of the country were depopulated of freemen, while Rome swarmed with a horrible population of half savage paupers, who were only kept in good humour by doles. Then, as now, charity was more fashionable than justice, and rich men distributed every day at their doors baskets of food. Then, as now, bread was distributed at public expense, and conservatives

were ready to charge the revenue with any amount of pauperising gifts to the people in a desperate attempt to avoid fundamental reforms. But all injustice is only an embodied lie, that carries within it the elements of conviction and destruction. As the overthrow of the Western Empire was prepared by the pauperism, wretchedness, vice, and crime that festered in the overcrowded population of Rome, we may very well believe that it was begun by the huge solitudes of luxury from which the people were repelled into the city.

I am not going to press the analogy too far. We live in a different world. Thanks to that "enthusiasm of humanity" which, let Positivists say what they will, we owe to Christianity, we have resources of moral recuperation and political reform such as not the noblest Roman of them all could imagine. We shall not meet the fate of ancient empires. We shall not be the fools of a stolid conservatism, nor the dupes of suicidal violence. Still, it is surely an ominous fact that such a conversion of the central domain of the empire into a luxury for the few, as exists among ourselves, can hardly be paralleled anywhere, except in the system that sowed the seeds of ruin for the Romans.

Where land is a luxury, the luxurious find its enjoyment heightened by solitude. "Woe," cried the ancient prophet, "to them that lay field to field till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!" But is not that what has been done in the north of Scotland for half a century past? And, to a smaller extent, it has been the policy in England for even longer. Why have so many cottages been pulled down? Why have labourers to walk

five or six miles before beginning a weary day's work? Surely it is because the old law of settlement started a policy persevered in now for other reasons. No one must reside on the estate but those who are absolutely necessary to the great owner's convenience. And the tendency has been to diminish these in number. Fewer hands are now needed, I suppose, in proportion to acreage than ever before. It is no justification to urge that in this way the largest revenue is obtainable. That system is best, not which brings in most money, but which plants most men on the soil in remunerative employment. But whatever may be said about the superior productiveness of English land as compared with that of France, for instance, the experience of some few tillers of their own land is very suggestive of the possibility of a large increase. Yet, so long as the landlord's sport is as important as the farmer's crops, so long as trim fields may be ravaged, and fences broken and gates smashed by the galloping of a hundred horses at the tail of a fox, it is not likely that the exactitude and order and neatness of high scientific farming will be extensively attained.

But farther, the influence of the oligarchic system of society in our rural districts has not been morally, any more than materially, beneficial to the scattered millions there. The ideal of a jovial squire and a gentlemanly parson, patronising and cultivating their humble neighbours, is rarely attained; and, when attained, it is not a high one. People receptive of blankets, soup, and tracts, receiving on authority a religion they do not understand, and meekly obeying orders as to baptism, vaccination and catechism, are not likely to develop much independent

manhood. And, without independent manhood in the million, social reform is impossible. Fathers and mothers, taught to rely on charity, bring children into the world by the dozen, and then know no more what to do with them than "the old woman who lived in a shoe." The end is, they are drafted off to the thronging towns to look in vain for labour, and then to cadge for charity there. Such a state of things must necessarily depress the standard of subsistence, on which the general market rate of wages so much depends. For while the millions at the base of the social structure live on charity and chance, the million next above them are liable to a very demoralising, because unnatural, competition.

Now if by some fantastic doom of invisible powers this land system with all its curses were made a necessary accident of national prosperity, we might resign ourselves to fate. But national prosperity does not mean the riches of a few hundred thousand men and the poverty of the rest; and it is demonstrable that by the working of this system the land itself is impoverished and the nation robbed. For, as we have seen, the owners of all great estates are only life tenants, and whatever they expend on improvements is deducted from their personal income without hope of adequate return. Besides, the settlement has in many cases so saddled them with rent charges, that they have hardly enough left to keep up their dignity. The farmers, liable, mostly, at any moment to disturbance and spoliation, have no inducement to put money in the land. The heir in tail watches jealously lest any changes should interfere with his rights or threaten his prospects of sport. The effect of all is to keep drainage,

fencing, and manuring far below the level necessary to the best scientific methods. And at the present moment neither life tenant nor occupier, nor anyone else, has his individual interests so engaged as to prompt him to enterprise.

Finally, so far as the evils of the territorial system are concerned, it has favoured the land owners in throwing off their legitimate burdens. I do not believe either in the practicability or the efficacy of Mr. Henry George's plan for taxing all land up to its full annual value. But, on the part of those who are necessarily excluded from the possession of land, it is a very fair claim that the national territory should, through its privileged occupiers, pay a very large share of the expenses of government. In fact this was acknowledged in 1692, when land owners agreed to pay one-fifth of the annual value, or four shillings in the pound. But having previously got rid of their feudal obligations, the territorial oligarchy found it easy to manipulate the money charge. And whereas at the present day four shillings in the pound would produce nearly thirty-five millions, the actual amount received from the land tax is very little over one million.

The case is too strong to need farther argument. And though it is not half stated, it may well fill us with amazement that such a land system has been tolerated so long. The explanation lies partly in popular ignorance, and partly also in the fact that in the brief intervals of lucidity between our fits of war fever and panic, we have had enough to do to get parliamentary reform and free trade. But now we have, or are assured of having, parliamentary reform

enough for all practical purposes, if only we have sense and self-control to make use of it. I well know how many abuses and nuisances await the radical besom. But I declare I know of nothing Parliament can touch that would be so pregnant with good to the people at large as land-law reform. I do not wish to exaggerate. I do not for a moment expect that this alone will suffice to extinguish pauperism or crime. But I am certain that it will do very much indeed to raise the standard of subsistence and to extend reasonable comfort.

We hear a great deal in these times about "land nationalisation," and, if the phrase is reasonably understood, the idea is a very good one. In one sense, and that a very real one, a sense emphatically sanctioned by lawyers, the land is national property already, and cannot possibly be denationalised. For lawyers will tell you that neither individuals nor corporations can have more than a *tenure* in land. Absolute property in it, they say, is impossible, except to the crown—by which I understand the nation. The case, then, is this, that holders of land under the crown have abused their tenure by various innovations and corruptions, until their tenancy has become an intolerable nuisance. The true remedy would seem to be neither wholesale confiscation, nor any impracticable communism, but a repeal of the various innovations, or abuses, or effete privileges, that have turned the necessary institution of private land tenure into a huge land monopoly. The main purpose in land tenure, as in everything else, should be the common good; and all accidents of land tenure opposed to the common good should be swept away. We have seen how primogeniture, and entail, and strict settlements

tend to monopoly. They should, therefore, be abolished by the first democratic parliament. We have seen how the power of eviction makes a landlord a despot. It should, therefore, be greatly limited, and, in the case of farmers who pay their rents, should be as difficult as in Ireland. Agriculture is continually subordinated to sport; and for this reason, as well as because of the bad blood, and crime, and cruelty they cause, the game laws should be erased from the statute book. In a word, take away the accidental features of land tenure which make land a luxury instead of a business investment. Make it impossible for any one to ensure the continuity and integrity of a landed estate beyond his own lifetime. Deprive landlords of their despotic and popish powers. Raise honest tenants beyond their vengeance, by fixity of tenure. Compel owners to sell on reasonable terms when land is wanted for places of worship, or study, or amusement desired by a sufficient quorum of inhabitants. Take away all inducement to waste good land on sport, by leaving hunting and shooting free to all, till there is nothing left to hunt or shoot. In a word, this is a case for levelling down rather than levelling up. Take away all privileges that make land a luxury; substitute a public register for cumbrous title-deeds; impose a sufficient land tax; and then you will find the distribution of land accommodate itself to the requirements of general enterprise—that is, of the common good.

If any man would go farther I would invite him to consider some arguments in the next lecture. It is impossible now to give all the objections I feel against any system of land communism. Nor, indeed, is it necessary. For, in the

stage of progress we have reached, the thing is as much out of date and as impossible as the clan system in the Highlands, or the septs of Ireland. Talk about it is, in my conviction, sheer waste of time. But, lest I should seem guilty of intolerance towards any earnest friends of progress, I shall hope to say something on the subject when dealing with the distribution of wealth; for that, to some people, naturally suggests communism.

Indeed my object now is not so much to advocate or to condemn any detailed projects of reform, but rather to urge the overwhelming importance of the issue. Conservatives, or whatever may be the name of the new party that is to succeed to the inheritance of the dead—will do their utmost to distract attention from this subject by schemes of relief out of rates and taxes, or by projects of emigration. But that is a cruel kindness which, by way of compensation for past injustice, robs people of self-respect and the power of self-help. I do not want to see a peasantry with houses built out of the rates; I want to see them build houses for themselves, and on their own land. Emigration is the natural means by which a strong and enterprising race asserts its vitality and extends its life. But to crush people into pauperism, and then send them out to battle with wild nature, is not the true method of emigration. A contented and prosperous population are soon aware when they are too thick upon the land, and they are all well able to arrange emigration for themselves. But to make solitudes for wealthy luxury, to drive labour into the towns, and then cry out that the country is overcrowded, does not seem like rational statesmanship. Let us insist that our land laws accommodate themselves to the needs of the

time. Let us set before us as our aim, not the greatest profit in money, but the sustenance of the largest number of people on the land. And if other co-ordinate measures secure the fruits of industry to the right owners, we may be sure that, in the long run, emigration will take care of itself.

LECTURE V.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH.

THE introductory remarks of the last lecture are equally applicable to the subject we now have in hand. It is needless to recapitulate them, though it may be as well briefly to remind you of their purport. We found that by acknowledgment of all political and economic parties, our civilisation in its social aspects is gravely defective, and that the one most striking defect which equally impresses itself upon the hearts of all is the extraordinary extremes of luxury on the one hand, and destitution on the other, characteristic even of the most prosperous states. Some social reformers—Mr. Henry George in particular—are in the habit of tracing the whole of this evil to the institution of private property in land. With this view I professed myself unable to agree. It is an exaggeration to say that the whole of our miseries are to be traced to this source. At the same time, I not only admitted, but strongly insisted, that our antiquated territorial system has become an anachronism wholly incongruous with the present age, and, like all institutions founded on falsehood, productive of enormous mischief. But surely another main source of the evils afflicting society is the defective and unjust distribution of the wealth produced by the alliance of capital and labour.

Let us suppose for a moment that our land laws were made ideally perfect, in whatever direction such perfection may lie. Still, of course, it is inconceivable that the whole

population should receive their sustenance direct from their own land. Even in a completely agricultural community this would be impossible. Land is incapable of infinite subdivision, and even if you started with a system under which every man should cultivate with his own hands his ten or twelve acres, twenty years would not elapse before a class of labourers would have arisen who would depend for their sustenance upon wages. But we are not specially interested in a purely agricultural community. In our country the population is about equally divided between agriculture on the one hand and manufactures or commerce on the other; and even though we should succeed in restoring to the rural districts a larger population than is at present found there, yet it is probable that the commercial and manufacturing part of the nation would, in the meantime, increase in a corresponding ratio. No reform of the land laws, therefore, would directly and immediately affect more than one-half of the people. Its indirect and more remote effects would undoubtedly be universal. It would, I believe, tend to raise the standard of subsistence, to diminish pauperism, and to lead emigration into natural channels. Still, however much the standard of subsistence may be improved, so long as a man's whole income is spent in keeping it up, we can scarcely allow that he lives in reasonable comfort. It is evident, therefore, that the distribution of wealth has to be considered altogether apart from the land laws.

Whether any form of communism is necessary, or desirable, is a question that may be considered presently. Meantime it is more important to make plain the precise point we are to keep in view. "The distribution of

wealth" is a wide term, and might be taken to include a good deal more than I care to touch just now. For instance, it might embrace the devolution of property, the division of estates, the commercial currents set up by foreign investments of English money. But all that we are concerned with now is the mode in which the wealth produced by industry and enterprise from year to year is distributed amongst those who produce it. Let us take an imaginary case; and while I am stating it pray bear in mind that it is not the exact figures that are important, but only the principle illustrated. For the figures may be altered indefinitely, and yet the principle may remain the same.

Let us then suppose a capitalist to engage in an undertaking that requires him to invest £100,000 for a full year before any returns come in. Let us farther premise that the work is begun at a favourable time, and that it is fairly remunerative. In order to carry out the enterprise, he has to employ a considerable amount of labour, partly skilled and partly unskilled; and the wages he pays will be governed entirely by the state of the labour market. His skilled workmen may receive from £1 10s. to £2 a week; and unskilled labourers 18s. to £1 2s. I leave out of the question boys or women. Their lower wages would not much affect the argument, and would needlessly complicate the statement of the case. The men work, say, fifty weeks in the year, and receive their pay regularly. This is part of the expenses essential to the enterprise, as much so as coals for the steam-engine, or the cost of raw material. At the end of the year, taking the wages of the skilled workmen

at an average of £1 15s., each will have received £87 10s. for fifty weeks' work, and they have nothing more to expect. The labourers, allowing them an average of £1 a week, will have taken £50, and also have nothing more to expect. At the end of the year they are none of them one penny richer than they were at the beginning. The skilled workman might, no doubt, by thrift and self-denial above the average, have put £5 or so in the savings' bank. But how the town labourer with a wife and four children lives at all on £1 a week is known only to himself and his kind. In most cases, I presume, he must be content with a habitation of one room, that serves as kitchen, parlour, dormitory, nursery, and washhouse.

Now what does the capitalist look for at the end of the year? He receives back, in the first place, his £100,000, with £5,000 additional as interest. This he does not reckon as profit at all. It is regarded as simply recouping money out of pocket. For if he had not employed his money in this way he could have lent it on mortgage at 5 per cent. In addition to this, it is supposing no extravagant gain in good times if we credit him with a real profit of 15 per cent., or £15,000. It might be very much more; but the precise possibilities of the case do not concern us. What we wish to examine is the question whether the principle of the absorption of all profit by capital is fair and right.

We need not be afraid of it. I fully acknowledge that it is a burning question; but it is not an explosive one. It affects only indirectly the unemployed and destitute, who are the real elements of revolution among us. Should the steady wage-earners come to the conclusion that a

change in the system is necessary, they will seek it only by moral pressure. It would not pay them to make a wide convulsion in the labour market for the purpose. The change, if desirable, can only be brought about gradually, by tentative processes such as will enable trade and commerce to adapt themselves to new conditions. It is a matter in which the Legislature cannot possibly interfere. We have long abandoned the notion that wages can be settled by law; and still less is it possible to settle by law the division of profits. There is, therefore, no reason why we should shirk the question; and we cannot do so; for if we would, it is being forced upon us by the imperative necessity for greater equability in the conditions of life.

Well, then, we put the question thus: Is it just and fair that the capitalist, in an enterprise such as we have outlined, should absorb the whole of the profit to himself? Observe, that the claim to reasonable interest on his money is not for a moment doubted. We may also put on one side as indisputable his right to an adequate remuneration for his labour and skill in superintendence. Let us say that is worth £1,000 for the year, and let us deduct it from the 15 per cent. of profit. There will still remain an amount of £14,000, which is clear gain, over and above the repayment of all expenses, salaries, and interest. I know it is commonly, though not universally, regarded as a matter of course that the whole of this gain should be appropriated by capital. But I confess it does not appear to me a matter of course at all. Here are a number of men voluntarily engaged in a common enterprise. A hundred of them contribute labour and skill; and one alone contributes the necessary money, together with the

general design and directing wisdom. There is evidently quite sufficient reason for his keeping the lion's share of the profit, and I quite admit that, were this not allowed, individual enterprise would be discouraged, and probably exterminated. But, if he brings money and oversight, the workmen bring labour. The second contribution is as indispensable as the former; and I cannot quite see the justice of an arrangement by which at the end of the common enterprise he is £14,000 to the good, and all the rest are precisely where they were at the beginning. Very few of them have even £5 between them and recourse to the pawn-shop. They have just been kept going; that is all. But they have made no profit. Now, suppose that the capitalist were to content himself with three-fourths of the clear gain, say £10,500. Then there would be £3,500 to divide amongst the workers. They ought not all to share alike, but in proportion to the value of their contribution to the common enterprise. And this would be best determined by the amount of their earnings in wages. But supposing the number of workmen were a hundred, there would be an average of £35 assignable to each as his share of profit over and above his wages, and he would be that much better off at the end of the year than at the beginning.

This is the system of "profit-sharing" advocated by Professor Sedley Taylor in a little volume of collected essays. It is not a mere dream. It has been practically carried out in principle, though with many differences of detail, in a variety of businesses, especially in France. M. Leclaire, a house decorator in Paris, was, I believe, the first to adopt it. He persevered in it to the end of a long life,

and nothing made him more angry than compliments on his generosity. For he declared that he was actuated by purely mercenary motives, or at least business principles, and to his dying day maintained that he had made more money out of his business by this plan than he could have done on any other. The reason he gave was, that as all workmen were directly interested in swelling the profits, there was less waste, more economy, and greater energy in work than would otherwise have been possible. I shall not pretend to judge whether M. Leclaire was precisely accurate in saying that he had made more money for himself by his scheme than he could have done on the ordinary plan. Yet this at least is true, that what he did make was worth far more to him than millions made by grinding the faces of the poor. But I am most anxious that his plan should not be misunderstood. You are not to suppose that the *wages* he paid were dependent on his profits. For he gave wages week by week according to the rate prevailing in other shops of the same kind. And then at the end of the year, after the balance-sheet had been made up, he distributed, in addition, a share of the profits, reckoned to each man in proportion to his wage-earnings. As might be expected, the dividends of the workmen were to a considerable extent invested in the business, and of late it has developed, I believe, into a practically co-operative partnership.

The example of M. Leclaire has been followed by several other capitalists in France, and it seems likely to spread. In England, many employers give a bonus in good years to their chief assistants; and, on the other hand, a considerable amount of attention has

been excited by co-operative enterprises. But the division of profits between capital and labour on any fixed and definite system has not hitherto made any way amongst us. I am aware that it has been tried in some cases, and has broken down. The alleged reason in one or two remarkable instances was the unreasonable notion of the workmen that a division of profits was always possible both in bad years and good. If that were so, it is a fresh proof of the need of popular education, moral as well as intellectual. Self-control and fairness are as necessary to the emancipation of the million as an assertion of their own claims. Nevertheless, I cannot conceive how the present terrible contrast of luxury and destitution are to be moderated unless profit-sharing finds a place in our measures of social reform.

Before indicating how it might be expected to work, and how in fact it has worked to a certain extent in France, let me endeavour to anticipate the volley of objections certain to be made were this a meeting for debate. And, first, there are those who hold that workmen who have been paid the market rate of wages have already received their share of the profit from the common enterprise. They might as well say that the steam-boiler has consumed profit in the tons of coal that were burned under it, or that the horses have eaten so much profit in their oats. In a badly-managed business it is quite conceivable this might be true, because more coals and more oats than were necessary had been used, and therefore the really productive expenditure would have to recoup this waste; that is, it would be so much taken out of profit. But in the case of all expenditure absolutely necessary to

the production of work this is not true. It is no more a diminution of profit than seed cast into the ground and fructifying is a loss to the granary. All wasted seed *is* a loss; but not that which sprouts and ripens. Just so, all needless expenditure is so much deducted from profit, and is, therefore, taken out of it. But not so with necessary expenditure. This comes back again with interest. It does not diminish the profit, but makes it.

Wages, therefore, are not the workman's share of the profit. They are part of the necessary expenses of the common enterprise. In the cotton states of America, when slave labour was employed, it was a fallacy to suppose that no wages were paid. The only difference was that they were paid in kind: that is, in food, clothing, lodging, medicine, and care, not only for the adults, but for their families as well. The standard of subsistence for a slave was very low, and therefore the wages were low: coarse food, rough, scanty clothing, and miserable lodging. As a consequence the returns in work were low; for it is well known that slave labour was wasteful, and made scientific agriculture impossible. But the point is that the keep of the slaves was an absolutely necessary expense; and will any one say this was taken out of profit? When we turn to free labour, the case is not so much different as might be desired. Wages are paid in money, and not in kind. The standard of subsistence is higher. But the rate of pay, though it fluctuates slightly, is always kept so near the standard of subsistence that wages really represent the necessary expense of keeping the labourer and his household alive while the work is going on. There is no question of profit here. It is not

taken out of the capitalist's profit, and it represents no profit to the workman.

Again, it is said, if the workman is to share in profits, he also ought to share in losses. This sounds very plausible, but, like a good many other plausibilities, will not bear examination. For out of what do the employer's losses come? Out of his capital. Of course, he may have reserve funds, or accumulations not actually employed in his business, and he may draw on these. But he does so to replace lost capital. Now, out of what is the workman's share of loss to come? Out of his bread basket, and his oven, and his cupboard, I suppose. Wages are so near the standard of subsistence that if they are seriously diminished this is what it comes to. When one man meets a loss by selling a carriage and horses, while the other has to pawn the coat off his back, they are scarcely on commensurable terms. Still it may be objected, if a hundred workmen received an average profit, as just now suggested of £35, in addition to their year's wages, at least a levy might be made on this if the next year turned out badly. But with what justice could this be asked? They will undoubtedly suffer by having no profit in addition to their wages at the end of the bad year. To that extent they will suffer and ought to suffer with the employer. If the depression be general also, the market rate of wages will be forced down, and they will suffer in that way as well. But to inflict any other fine upon them would be sheer robbery. The bonus given the previous year was part of a finished transaction. The next year's operations are another transaction altogether. They have no share in directing it, and if it turns out badly it would be monstrous to re-open

the business of the previous year, and ask them to refund. If indeed they have invested their savings in the business, then those savings are liable to the risks of the business, but not otherwise. It may be urged that in this case the workmen might cry, "Heads we win, tails you lose." Not quite so, for they lose their bonus, and their gain in prosperous years is utterly insignificant compared with those of the capitalist. In fact, it is only on condition of his accepting the losses in adverse times that it is at all possible to justify his absorption, in good times, of a half or three-fourths of the profit, in addition to interest on money and salary for superintendence. Such an advantage is quite a sufficient consideration for his risk. To recur to our supposed case: if he makes £10,500 one year—besides interest and salary, be it remembered—he may very well afford to lose £2,000 a year for three bad years, and still be the gainer in the end.

I do not care to reply to other and more vulgar objections, resting on the bad uses often made of an occasional and accidental excess of wages. During the coal mania of a few years ago we were amused by stories of prosperous colliers drinking magnums of champagne, or feeding bull-pups on prime steak. So far as such stories represent truth, they showed that human nature in colliers is very much the same as in the golden youth of our aristocracy. But with such follies I have nothing to do at present. You are not to withhold just concessions from men because it is possible they may make a bad use of them. Our excessive social inequalities have undoubtedly depressed the moral tone, as well as the physical comfort, of millions. Correct the injustice with one hand, while

you sow the seeds of higher culture with the other, and in the long run the result will be unmingled good. The common-place virtues, that perhaps haunt by preference the middle ranks of our social grades, are certainly not owing to any superiority in the human nature found there. They are favoured by the happy union of constant occupation with a balance at the bank. If the golden youth of the London clubs had to work for their living, and if the millions of toilers had a little surplus over the barest necessary expenditure, middle-class virtues would gradually permeate both extremes. In saying this I do not wish to imply that character is solely the fruit of physical conditions. But making due allowance for cases of exceptional vigour of will, the average development of character is necessarily limited or stimulated by circumstances. And hence it is not merely for the spread of reasonable enjoyment—though that surely is worth something—but it is much more as a potent instrument in moral regeneration that I long for a juster distribution of wealth.

Suppose now that by some such apportionment of profits as has been suggested, and also by the subordination of land laws to popular needs, it became the rule, and not the exception, for the millions to have a margin of income beyond the mere necessaries of life. All experience of human nature goes to show that habits of thrift would be gradually formed. It is of no use to urge against such an expectation the drinking bouts and vicious amusements and betting manias that follow a brief hour of prosperity. For the customs and institutions of five hundred years have induced in the average Englishman a habit of living from hand to mouth—not likely to be

surrendered except under a permanent change of conditions. A man who usually gets £1 a week, and for once makes £1 10s., is almost certain to spend the extra half-sovereign in some extravagant excitement to relieve the monotony of life. But if he get a permanent increase of twice or thrice that amount, supposing him young enough to change, and surrounded by suitable moral influences, he will accommodate his habits to his income, not in the way of self-indulgence, but in the increase of convenience and refinement.

The same principle applies to whole classes of men. Brief and exceptional gains induce extravagant indulgence; but a permanent increase of means inspires a better ambition. It would not come about all at once. A generation or two would disappear, and education, uncontrolled and unwarped by ecclesiastical vested interests, would have to do its work, before the full effect was seen. But little by little the decencies and elegances and safeguards, made possible by a margin of income, would win their way. Fashion is as mighty amongst the million as amongst the upper ten thousand; and when thrift had been made a general possibility, it would in time become the fashion.

But the growth of thrift is only one among the advantages that would spring from a better distribution of wealth, and the general establishment of a margin between income and bare subsistence. For capital and labour would enter into their true relation of alliance, instead of opposition. The increase of profit would be clearly to the interest of labour, as well as of capital, because labour would share it. The experience of the profit-sharing

system in France goes far to prove that under such circumstances the utmost possible economy, both of time and materials, is secured; and as a result the total amount of profit is substantially increased. On the other hand, there has, I believe, been some apprehension amongst trades' unions that the sharing of profits might be made a pretext for depressing wages. But I do not think there is sufficient reason for such a fear. For French experience shows that, as a matter of fact, enterprises conducted on this plan have always paid the market rate of wages. And besides, the constituents of trades' unions would be much stronger than they are at present. At least it would be entirely their own fault if they were not. For as they could very well store up a reasonable portion of their profit-dividend, they could, if necessity arose, hold out better against unjust proposals to reduce wages. Nor can it be supposed that so uncertain and fluctuating an element as profit could, in the long run, interfere with the economic law by which average wages are caused always and everywhere to hover somewhere near the cost of subsistence. This is an essential expense, without which business could not be carried on, and it will always keep its place in the calculations of enterprise. For the labourer has to live, whether the enterprise succeeds or not.

But another aspect of profit-sharing seems to shed the light of hope upon the fluctuations of trade. Let us go back to the case of a capitalist who in a good year makes 15 per cent. He is, of course, not alone; there are hundreds around him making the same profit, or even more. Now what do they do with it? They say, next

year will be like this, and much more abundant; there is a wave of business prosperity coming, and we must be ready to take advantage of it. And so a large part of the profit is invested in new machinery, bigger engines, and a larger supply of the raw material. More and more goods are produced in a ratio rapidly overtaking demand. Then the market is glutted; the new machinery stands idle; wages fall; half-time is proposed. Rich men with money locked up begin to curse the Government and free trade, while poor men with empty pockets growl about communism and Mr. Henry George. Now, suppose that some share of the profit in these prosperous years had gone to the workers in addition to good wages. Certainly there would have been a little less to spend on new factories or on the reckless extension of production; and I do not think that would be a great disadvantage. But a very clear advantage would have been this: that so much more money in the pockets of the million would have tended to keep up the demand in the home market. There would, therefore, be a double influence at work tending to equalise the course of trade. Thus, there would be less money available for mere gambling on future chances. But there would be more money to keep up the home market, and the demands for this would lessen the danger of a glut abroad. It is not unreasonable, then, to presume that a system of profit-sharing, if generally adopted, would tend to prevent the violent oscillations from which commerce suffers, and to give a more even tenor to trade, as well as to diffuse comfort among the many. We might have fewer millionaires, but we should also have less destitution. In such a community moderate

riches would give a purer and nobler happiness than extravagant wealth does now. And, on the other hand, occasional failure, or exceptional poverty, would not be embittered, as it is now, by the glaring inequality of chances for the many and the few.

Once more I must guard myself against misapprehension of the views I have put forward on this subject. The principle is one that cannot possibly be enforced by law. Where it commends itself to a sense of justice it will, I believe, afterwards approve itself to practical minds by its commercial and social results. The land laws, of course, need the drastic hand of the Legislature; and their reform would do something towards a more equable diffusion of wealth. But this would be quite incomplete and inadequate apart from a more equitable distribution of the wealth produced by the alliance of capital and labour. This second reform is dependent wholly upon moral forces, and I cannot conclude without a word of profound regret that one institution, from which the needful moral inspiration might have been expected, has not only been indifferent to the question, but has set a most demoralising example.

That institution is the Church—not one sect or denomination only, not the Establishment alone—but the whole organised multitude of the professed followers of Him who said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." This saying, which obviously points to the blessedness of contentment with a little, and of loyalty to the divine order of the world, has been taken as a promise of wealth and security as the reward of a pious temper. Experience shows that every religious society, when once

maturely organised, tends to make its members prosperous. It has been so with the Quakers conspicuously; and to a smaller extent it is true of the Independents, the Baptists, and the Wesleyans. The result is that, with the exception of the Primitive Methodists, such societies, even if they originated amongst the poor, tend to become more and more "respectable" and exclusive. This is the reason why from time to time novelties, like the "Hallelujah Band," and the "Salvation Army," have to be invented in order to gather in ragged regiments from the streets. In fact, this tendency of religion to make its votaries comfortable is often dwelt on with much complacency. For it is said, and with good reason, that the success is assured by the moral qualities, such as industry and self-control—I am not sure about honesty—that are formed by church training. Now, all this may be true. Yet remembering the first Teacher of Christianity, and how all his longing was to seek and to save the lost, we cannot but regret that in ecclesiastical congresses the question of the distribution of wealth is touched so timidly.

But then we are told to contrast the example of the great Establishment. Here, at least, is a Church avowedly set for the defence of the poor, with sacred buildings planted everywhere, even in the poorest districts, and with an endowed gentleman in every parish to show a good example. The theory is capable of exhibition in very beautiful forms, but the practice somehow does not answer to it. That in itself would, of course, not be very surprising. But it is surely strange to hear men speak of the Church Establishment as a corrective to social inequalities, when the whole of its external organisation is dictated by

the worship of wealth. There is nothing in all our institutions, neither primogeniture, nor entail, nor the marriage market, nor even sweating shops—nothing that teaches such wicked and anti-Christian lessons on the distribution of wealth as the division of Church revenues. And for this reason, that it is poison where we expect medicine, corruption where we look for inspiration, a justification offered to our baser desires where we look for an example to our nobler nature. If that corruption is worst which affects what is best; if the defection of a saint or hero is more harmful than shameless vice; if treachery in the trusted guardians of a sacred cause is more fatal than open opposition, then surely injustice in the distribution, within the Church itself, of wealth appropriated to the service of religion is a worse evil than even dishonest greed in trade. The revenue from ecclesiastical estates and tithes is at the least £6,000,000 a year, and voluntary contributions, with pew-rents—the latter a bad source of income, but still available for the support of the clergy—probably add not less than another million. Taking the clergy actually engaged in the cure of souls at 20,000, this would allow an income of £350 a year to every one of them. An exactly equal distribution is for many reasons impossible. But remembering the number of young men in the profession with no one but themselves to keep, and for whom £200 would be sufficient, there is obviously margin enough to allow of reasonably large incomes in cases of exceptional responsibility and expense. I am not, therefore, suggesting an impracticable equality. Yet, surely, it would be but reasonable to expect that the richest Church in Christendom should give a salutary

example of at least moderate fairness in the distribution of wealth, or at any rate should not sanction by her authority the glaring inequalities, the unnatural extremes of splendour and misery, that distract our civilisation.

Every one knows how contrary to such a reasonable expectation are the actual facts. Two archbishops, and thirty bishops, between them draw £163,300, and this does not include the annual value of their official residences, reckoned at £13,200. Thus these thirty dignitaries divide among themselves £176,500 a year, or an average approaching £6,000. And at the other end of the scale you have hard-working curates grateful for old clothes and hampers of provisions. Nay, the case of the beneficed clergy is quite strong enough to prove my case. For a clergyman writing to the *Times* the other day explained that there were more than 8,000 livings with incomes of less than £300 a year, and out of this either a curate has to be paid, or a considerable part of the work must be left undone. The average for the whole country is stated by Mr. Martin at £285. Now, when it is remembered that a considerable number of benefices give the incumbent £1,000 a year or more, it will be seen that a very much larger number can yield little more than £100 to £150. But meantime the Archbishop of Canterbury has £15,000 a year besides his palaces; the Archbishop of York £10,000, and the Bishop of London the same.

It is of no avail to plead, as is sometimes done, that these revenues belong, not to the Church at large, but to "corporations sole," with a sufficient title to their property. For Parliament has repeatedly set aside any such claims, and has manipulated the revenues at its pleasure. The

bishops are now not owners at all. Everything is in the hands of commissioners. And the fact that this enormously wealthy Commission, with revenues constantly swollen through the increasing value of suburban land, should be so constantly engaged in works on episcopal palaces and grounds, while poverty, and sometimes even destitution, harass so many of the clergy, is surely a scandal that ought to make a deeper impression than it does. It is not the fault of the men concerned. They execute their commission faithfully. But that commission itself is the outcome of the Church's own teaching on the distribution of wealth. And never in all the history of Christianity was there a heresy more deadly than this. The notion is that spiritual dignitaries, to be respected, must be clothed in pomp like secular princes. If that be so, there can hardly be a surer proof that religion is dead. But I, for one, do not believe it. The priests of most immortal power have not been Wolseys, but men like Wyclif and Wesley, to whose transcendent earnestness food and clothing sufficient for the day were all the revenue wanted.

For some dangerous forms of extreme re-action against the present distribution of wealth the churches of all denominations are largely to blame. For through the excessive importance attached to money, whether in the shape of endowments, or pew-rents, or ostentatious subscriptions, they have themselves been infected with the commercial spirit. Prophets clothed in a hair shirt and a leathern girdle, content with locusts and wild honey, could address both tax-gatherers and merchants and soldiers with an authority altogether impossible to the pleasant social clubs gathered now by the attractions of

the pulpit. Neither learning, nor zeal, nor philanthropy are wanting. But the power of protest against the sleek complacency of commercial success has been for centuries in abeyance.

Yet it is not a little remarkable that social reformers outside the Church should seek their precedent in the fiery days of primitive Christianity, and should advocate a system of communism once tried in Jerusalem and found impracticable. In spite of the contradiction of her professed followers, the original bent and natural inclination of Christianity is in the direction of communism. For he that loves his neighbour as himself cannot be happy if he fares sumptuously every day while Lazarus lies at the door in rags. But then this passion for equality was, in the primitive Church, somewhat like the wild justice of modern revolutionists—a generous but impossible dream. It was most valuable—it would be most valuable now—as a corrective of unrestrained individualism. But, as in the solar system centrifugal force is, equally with gravitation, an essential condition of orderly movement, so in any advanced stage of human organisation individualism is as necessary as socialism. Nomads, or savages, or Russian peasants, may live contentedly in communism, because the organisation is simple, and the sense of individuality is small. But humanity rises to higher and more complex organisations just in proportion as individual character and energy are independently developed. This development has its dangers, and needs correction. But to think of extirpating it is to propose a return to barbarism. Individual development needs individual aims, motives,

and ambitions to stimulate it. And, constituted as we are, such excitements are not usually possible apart from the institution of private property. It must be limited by, it must be subordinate to, the common good. But its total suppression would paralyse the energies of progress.

And I am sure that this is felt and believed even by many who use the word communism as a spell. The present ill-regulated distribution of wealth bears upon millions so heavily that the speculative amongst them are ready for desperate schemes. Yet, if by some unimaginable change every father of a family were to receive to-morrow a house, garden, furniture, and stock-in-trade, he would certainly wish to keep them to himself. The idea of holding them on sufferance would be intolerable; and if the institution of private property had been abolished, the new nation of happy cottagers would very soon restore it. In other words, it is undoubtedly to the interest of the many that more equal chances should be given to all. But to destroy private property would be to deprive all alike of the independence, and self-reliance, and security for the sake of which those more equal chances are desired. And the same principle applies to land. Land itself, indeed, cannot be individual property; but the tenure of it can, and must be, if enterprise and industry are to have a solid basis. But if you once grant this fixity of tenure—and even Mr. George does not deny the need for that—you have immediately a merchantable property, which no possible exaction of rent to the State can wholly deprive of value. For, say that the whole land value of a particular site were paid to the State in rent. An enterprising holder who establishes a flourishing

business there would soon confer on the site itself an additional value altogether apart from the buildings on it; and of this additional value conferred by his own industry it would be monstrous to rob him. If he sold his tenure, he would get that value. If he preferred to let it—and there is nothing in Mr. George's proposals to prevent that—then he would get annual payment for the special eligibility he had conferred on the site. But this is private rent over again. And the fact that all taxes were paid out of land revenue would set free a good deal of money to compete for advantageous tenures such as we have supposed. This would go on all over the country; and in fifty years preferential rents would be a common form of property.

After all, men have not been wholly fools even in the bad old times; and amongst the relics of ancient wisdom is the saying that, if you pitchfork nature out at the door, she will come in by the window. All reforms ought to recognise this truth. I would not be sparing of abuses. I would insist that the common good should be paramount over every consideration of law, custom, rank, or privilege. But I do not believe that the common good would really be served by making a bee-hive or an ant-hill the ideal of a human republic. The soul of man wants scope for personal character and power. In the heavens above us the story of eternal order and progress is illuminated by the stars. For astronomers show us the beginning of systems in the faint light of incoherent nebulæ, where there is neither sun, nor planet, nor satellite; nay, the chaotic mass has not yet developed chemical distinctions of matter as we know it. There is a molecular communism, where everything is

alike all through. Then, at the other end of the scale, astronomers point to our own solar system with a complicated equilibrium of moving order, each orb complete in itself, yet dependent on all the rest. And we are told that very probably myriads of the stars we see are the bright centres of systems like our own. The constellations that divide the sky are composed of them.

Heaven mirrors itself in the lower world. Here too, we see at one end of the scale simple, incoherent societies, where all characters are alike, and there is little division of labour or distinction of property. Separate, independent consciousness hardly exists. Even women and children are held in common. There is only a vague, feeble shimmer of that glory we call human life. But, at the other end of the scale, we see, or we anticipate, civilisations of complex movement in delicate equilibrium, where each individual man is the centre of a little world of his own. His family move around him as the planets round their sun. And though he is as nothing compared with the vast political constellation to which he belongs, he has his own domain, his own character and influence. This individuality, as well as his subordination, is governed by an eternal law of progress; and its suppression would threaten a return to primitive chaos. Perhaps the old prophet was a believer in evolution who said, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." The systems of separate worlds are nobler than the confused nebulæ. And it is possible to give a scientific interpretation to the prophetic utterance, "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

LECTURE VI.

DEMOCRATIC MORALS.

In human affairs everything in the last result turns on character. If in the course of these lectures we have found it necessary to insist with some iteration on the importance of circumstance, this has only been because we have observed that it is too much overlooked. For instance, how often have we been told that intemperance and thriftlessness are the causes of almost all social misery. And we feel that there is a great deal of truth in the assertion. But then we are impelled to ask, what is the cause of intemperance and thriftlessness? To this question some good people have no difficulty in replying that it is all owing to "original sin" and human depravity. Such an answer we have found to be not quite conclusive; because, apart from metaphysical difficulties, it does not account for the fact that intemperance and thriftlessness, like small-pox and cholera, haunt by preference squalid neighbourhoods, where low conditions of life prevail. It is not denied that moral heroism may overcome the most adverse circumstances; and in doing so it always has its reward; for there is no victory more glorious. But, on the other hand, we have contended that heroism of this kind is not a very common quality, and that if average men are to be kept right they must have conditions in their favour. On this ground we have insisted that one of the chief

difficulties in the way of the moral regeneration of society is the excessively unequal distribution of wealth, and the abject poverty of millions.

Still, it remains true that in human affairs everything ultimately turns upon character. It is because of weakness in character that adverse circumstances so easily prevail against us. And unless more favourable circumstances should foster a higher character, they cannot possibly secure happiness. We have been told by a great critic that "conduct is three-fourths of human life." But character is the heart of conduct, the origin of its impulses, the fountain of its energies. Therefore it is that I have desired to conclude this series of lectures on the struggle of democracy against oligarchy by some remarks on democratic morals. For I am very sure that if Conservative forebodings were true, and if the unrestrained power of the multitude were likely to make a moral chaos, then we had better all turn Tories at once. We have only to think for a moment what character means, to see how vital is the question.

Character is the stamp of moral individuality borne by a man, and affording a guarantee that his actions will be marked by coherency and consistency. During the Peninsular War a certain commissariat officer complained to Lord Wellesley that he was threatened by General Picton with suspension from the nearest tree unless supplies were forthcoming on the next morning. "Do you mean to tell me that Picton says he will hang you?" asked Lord Wellesley. "He does, my Lord, he does," replied the officer. "Then," rejoined the Commander-in-Chief, "if Picton says he'll hang you, he'll do it; be sure he'll do it."

Let us hope the supplies were forthcoming. But, at any rate, the story may illustrate what is meant by character; such a stamp of moral individuality as makes a man's actions calculable. If the friend you have known for thirty years as an honest man were arrested for picking a pocket, you would say at once what a fool the policeman must have been! Because, in your view, your friend has a certain stamp of moral individuality, a continuity of inclination, tendency, and motive, such as to make the alleged action inconceivable. Of course, there may be both good characters and bad. But, by custom, the word "character," as now defined, is generally taken in a good sense. To say of anyone that he is a "man of character," is to commend his uprightness; and, on the other hand, of a worthless pretender, we say he is "a man of no character."

It only needs an intelligent appreciation of the events of everyday life to realise of what enormous importance it is to society that the common-place millions, as well as the exceptional heroes, should possess character. There is a vulgar saying that, if in spiritual things we are saved by faith, in secular matters we are saved by the want of it. Yet, like a great deal that passes for wit, the saying is only the grotesque exaggeration of a half-truth. For though the imperfections of our fellow-creatures certainly compel us to keep a sharp look out, yet unless their actions were to some extent calculable, their promises trustworthy, and their loyalty a reasonable ground of confidence, social and commercial life would be impossible. However cleverly you may secure yourself by checks and counter-checks in the management of a business, you cannot avoid some

dependence on the faithfulness of the assistants who carry out your plans. We must all feel that we need overlooking. Conscience is often very drowsy, and wants poking up by the insistance of others on their just claims. But what a hell this world would be if there were no conscience at all, and conduct were never prompted by character! Not a meal could be eaten without fear of poison, not a bargain carried out except under the eyes of both parties to it, not a servant could be trusted out of sight, not an employer respected or believed. Our life would be like that of wild creatures in the woods, peering stealthily here and there for expected foes, and ready to strike or spring away at a shadow. In the last cold weather I watched some birds attracted by a handful of crumbs flung out on the frosty path. It was pathetic to mark their suspicion and distrust. They hopped wistfully within a yard or two, and fluttered sideways here and there in an agony of desire and fear. At length one would make a rush at a crumb and instantly fly away in terror. Emboldened by this example, another and another would snatch a morsel, till all was gone. But throughout it seemed that doubt and dread poisoned the feast. We may make mistakes in such a case in imputing human emotions to lower creatures. But be that as it may, I thought it was a picture of what life would be without the confidence inspired by character among our fellows.

Now, if character has had this importance, even under despotisms and oligarchies, of how much greater consequence must it be in democracies, where there is no longer any pretence of resistance to the undisguised might of the multitude! For the privileged few have maintained

very good rules for the morality of the multitude, even though they have not always set an example by keeping those rules themselves. The virtues of hard work, self-denial, domestic purity, and respect for authority, may have been enforced too often by oligarchies who did not conspicuously practise them. But the virtues are not the less real for all that. And if the democracy, when they become "a law unto themselves," should disdain such humble virtues, and count them redolent of slavery, then I would rather die before King Mob is crowned. It has been bad enough when class was arrayed against class; yet there was at least this consolation, that, at any rate within each hostile section of the community, a limited spirit of loyalty was cultivated, and self was often sacrificed to class interests. But if democracy means every man for himself, and if the conflicts of classes are to be merged in a free fight, each man with his hand against every other man, then it is another word for a moral chaos. Against such an issue no mere institutions can be a sufficient guard. Neither proportional representation, nor home rule, nor local option, nor the three F's, will avail us much unless democratic opinion enforces moral discipline in restraint of private greed. And the opinion necessary to maintain such discipline can only spring from the prevalence of character.

What, then, are the probabilities of the future? If we are to believe certain pessimists, the triumph of democracy must necessarily involve the subversion of morality. It is true that among such pessimists the security of wealth is usually the subject of chief anxiety. And, hence, among Tories, it is a common and legitimate matter for sneer that

Radicals, who become millionaires, for the most part develop a political as well as a commercial conservatism. But it is not about wealth alone that the watchmen sound an alarm. For democracy is declared to make communism inevitable; and communism is said to be defiant of religion, impatient of the marriage tie, incapable of respect for purity. Such fears as these beset not only political Conservatives. In fact, I fancy that most of these, being men of the world, know better than to believe in their own prophecies. But there are many good people of a sacred simplicity who, though tradition and association keep them in the Liberal ranks, yet as they look forward to the strange issues of the future, often breathe forth the ancient sigh, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" I believe such fears to be groundless; and I wish to say why I have strong confidence in democratic morality.

You know the sort of appeals to history by which those fears are supposed to be justified. Never, it is said, has any uprising of the mob against authority attained a temporary success, without bringing in its train crimes of violence, the plunder of property, and the disorder of all social relations. So it was under John Ball and Jack Cade. The rising of the peasants in the time of Luther terrified even the Reformer by its violence, and wrung from him indiscriminate denunciations, which are amongst the least worthy of his utterances. Above all, we are confronted with the excesses of the French Revolution, the butcheries by a blood-thirsty mob, and the shameless apotheosis of a harlot. Now, on such frightful examples I would make three remarks. In the first place, they are

not cases of democracy at all. The argument that would make them such is based on a very common confusion between that and mobocracy, which is a very different thing. What the precise difference is I shall try to express by and by. Meanwhile I would note that far truer types of democracy are to be found in the Swiss Federation of Republics, and in the United States of America. Of course, many just criticisms may be passed on both of these nations; but no one can say that the law is powerless, or that mob violence threatens public order. It is indeed too true that the judicial system in the United States is generally supposed to be not free from corruption. But an organisation that has survived the convulsion necessary to get rid of slavery is well capable of shaking off lesser evils.

The second remark I would make on those historical warnings against democracy is, that the disorders condemned were a passionate re-action against intolerable wrong; and it is altogether unfair to argue from this to the probable character of any democracy born of peaceful and gradual evolution. For if oppression, as we are told, "driveth a wise man mad," how much more likely is it to madden poor ignorant people whose first sense of injustice comes with the pinch of hunger! And my third remark is that, when fully admitted, the excesses condemned do not prove that even mob rule is worse than irresponsible government by privilege. For those alleged crimes of the oppressed were at any rate no worse than the wrongs they avenged. Nay, there was in them a sort of wild justice, that betokened the awakening of a nobler nature. It is no doubt right to condemn the orgies of murder with

which the Parisian mob, in the September massacres, slaked their thirst for blood. But it is surely altogether wrong to forget that the old court and nobility had upheld the law only that they might the more securely indulge at their will in extortion, adultery, and arbitrary imprisonment. When we call to mind how no peasant's crops were safe from noble greed, no peasant's daughter secure from courtly lust; when we remember how Louis XV., satirically called the "Well-Beloved," kept a house near his palace for purposes which by our law are punished with penal servitude, and deserve the gallows more than many a murder, we cannot wonder that such a state of things needed purification by blood and fire; and we may well doubt whether even the September massacres were worse than its continuance.

But now let us return to the first remark made by way of criticism on jeremiads about democracy and its dangers. We said that they referred properly to mobocracy—a very different thing. And here is the difference. A mob is a crowd swayed hither and thither by momentary impulse, without method, without order, and without any sense of responsibility on the part of those that start the impulse, or of those who give it effect. Between such a crowd and the idea of a self-governing people, as embodied in the Greek word "democracy," there is a striking contrast. For this is a people organised by distribution into various districts, callings, and offices, so that every man has his own duties, every man some orderly means of influencing the common decision, and also some responsible part in carrying it out. Undeniably there is one element common to the two conceptions—that of the mob and of the organised people.

In both cases there is the prevalence of a general desire, in place of submission to command. In both also it may be said that the ultimate decision is impersonal—an aggregate rather than an individual resolve. But in the one case, that of the mob, the decision is an impulse of unreflecting passion, with no appreciation either of causes or of consequences. In the other case, the decision is the result of orderly discussion under a sense of responsibility, and therefore, to some extent, it will be an outcome of reason. We are not however here concerned with the degree of intelligence likely to characterise democratic counsels. I have already in a previous lecture suggested some explanation of the paradox that political justice is often more manifest to the half-educated many than to the cultivated few. But it is on the moral elements in this conception of democracy that we should fix attention now. For in the distinction between the mob and the organised people, two moral characteristics are clearly present in the latter and wanting in the former. These are order and responsibility.

I call order a moral characteristic ; for in any sufficient and vital form it is impossible without loyalty—that is, willing devotion to the law of that whole to which we belong as parts.* Surely social order, in any adequate conception of it, is not a dead thing—the mechanical sway of physical force. As some masterful conquerors have "made a desert and called it peace," so they have established slavery and called it order. But the name is no more applicable in

* For fuller explanation of this I may venture to refer to "Lessons from the Rise and Fall of the English Commonwealth," Lecture V.

the second case than in the first. For order, like peace, means an equilibrium of life and energy, a harmony of wills, not the paralysis of human faculties. It concerns the mind and temper of a people, and not their bodies only. When therefore the late Emperor of the French on one occasion told his subordinates to mind their own business, and he would answer for public order, he made a profession which he and such as he never can fulfil. For the deadly acquiescence he secured was but the apparent peace of a corpse full of gnawing worms within. Sullen hate, loathsome corruption, mutual jealousies, bitter faction, suppressed passion, made a hell of the inner life of the Second Empire; and at the first great strain it broke up in ruin. The same observations might be made wherever force is idly supposed to be a remedy for the fever of discontent, whether in the prison-city of St. Petersburg, or in an Irish district under coercion. For real order you want loyalty. And, in the sense we attach to the word, that is never to be found so pure and noble and strong as in a true democracy.

Then, again, a general sense of responsibility is clearly a moral characteristic essential to a true democracy. And by responsibility we need not necessarily mean the foreboding of an account to be rendered to a personal or corporate judge, as, for instance, a sovereign, or a parliament, or a constituency. Such a prospect is, no doubt, a healthy stimulus to poor humanity. But my notion of responsibility goes beyond that. For we have to answer to ourselves, if we answer to no one else; and when we have reached a certain stage of moral evolution, self-contempt is "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is no

quenched." But, more than that, there is slowly permeating the heart of humanity just now the sense of a universal order, certain, imperious, irreversible, binding effects to causes just as surely in the affairs of human life as in the movements of the stars. One of the results of this dawning perception is seen in a growing respect for the laws of health. May we not have confidence that the same perception will extend to conduct? One of the best gifts of the highest religions of the world has been their embodiment in pictorial and emotional forms of a supreme moral order. "Be not deceived," they have said; "God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap." And I confess I cling to the hope that while science confirms the certainty of this order, and clears it of misconceptions, it will not, cannot, ultimately deprive us of the emotional sanctions enshrined in the traditions of religion. At all events we are encouraged by many signs to believe that a rational sense of responsibility for conduct is gradually pervading the multitudes who in old times used to be ordered about like children by their pastors and masters. And this is especially manifest wherever political power has been but lately acquired, For if you watch the proceedings, for instance, of the Trades Union Congress, an assembly fairly representative of the rising democracy, it must surely strike you that one of its most striking characteristics is a sense of responsibility bordering upon conservative caution.

From our point of view, democracy, or the self-government of an organised people, is the polity best adapted to diffuse most widely these moral elements of willing order and conscious responsibility. It is, therefore, most

favourable to the development of character in the multitudinous members of a state. In a recent number of the *Quarterly Review* an able writer appeared to think he was announcing a notable discovery in assuring us that, after all, democracy is "only a form of government." But surely, looking at the vital importance of organisation to the evolution of humanity, a form of government may be pregnant with consequences. Now, democracy is that form of government which aims at the widest possible diffusion of political power and responsibility. It seeks to impress every man with a sense of duty owed, not to rulers, but to the common good. With this view, it attempts to give everyone the opportunity of exerting precisely the influence possible to his character and energy, altogether apart from birth, rank, or fortune. Such an ideal is indeed difficult of attainment, and we are a long way from it yet. But it is what we aim at; and one of our reasons for keeping it steadfastly in view is that the nearer we approach it, the more favourable to popular morality do we make the conditions of life.

I know the incredulous laughter with which such an assertion has been hailed by the prophets of despotic force. I recognise, within limits, the justice of scornful sneers at Tamany rings, and official corruption, and all the moral diseases incidental to the yet incipient growth of the gigantic democracy across the Atlantic. But I remind myself that these curses are partly confined to city life, where the imported rascality of Europe abounds; and partly the result of a generally redundant prosperity and unassailable security, which make imperial politics of less consequence to the common multitude in the United

States than they are to us. And when all that is discounted, it remains true that never in recorded history were comfort, intelligence, self-respect, morality, and interest in life so fairly shared amongst fifty millions of people as they are in the great American Republic at the present day. I am not afraid of appealing, either to reasonable theory or to concrete facts, in maintaining that with democracy lies the best hope of that general diffusion of character on which the higher evolution, or, as some prefer to style it, the redemption, of humanity must depend.

We are speaking of democratic morals. We have seen that an organised people, mutually dependent on each other, may be expected to show a willing order and a conscious responsibility that are of the essence of morality. But we may be reminded that human passions are strong. We may be told that the brute nature in us has only been kept in order by representatives of heaven, brandishing the terrors of hell. And we may be challenged to show how the rule of morality is likely to be maintained when the sword of the magistrate is held by universal suffrage, and churches are robbed of their spiritual thunders. We need not shrink from the attempt, though at the same time it would be ridiculous to suppose that any forecast of ours can explore the strange and immeasurable future that is opening before us. Righteousness, without despot or priest; religion, without metaphysics or miracle: these are the future conditions of democratic morals. And what have we to say to their possibility?

Amongst the essentials of morality are a *standard* or a rule of right; a *sanction*, or a binding authority; and an *inspiration*, or an effective impulse. The last is too often

forgotten. But it is as necessary as the other two. For it is an old plague of humanity that we may own what is right and feel its authority, yet lack the impulse to do it. We want the inspiration that fires with love of good for its own sake. I mean nothing miraculous, save as "all this unintelligible world" is miraculous to contemplative souls; and, most of all, the mystery of human life. But the inspiration of which I speak must be a common gift, as universal as the rush of blood through the heart, if it is to be available for democratic morals.

First, however, a word or two on the standard of morals, or the rule of right. If this were a philosophical lecture-room or a theological hall, I might puzzle both my audience and myself with fine-drawn issues about utility, intuition, nature, and revelation. But being anxious only about practical considerations suitable to plain men, perhaps I may best start from the assumption that moral right and the greatest good to humanity are in the long run identical. I do not say that utility constitutes rightness. In fact, I do not myself believe that it does. But at any rate rightness is, in the long run, coincident with utility, or the greatest human good. And by the greatest good, I do not mean the largest mess of pottage—not fatness and comfort: I mean the highest development of faculty and energy, both in heart and mind and body. Whatever tends to that will be found identical with the best morality. I do not care to dispute now whether it is right because it has that tendency, or has that tendency because it is right. It is enough at this point to insist on the practical coincidence.

But, of course, it is very vague to say that the standard of

moral right means practically the highest good to humanity. We want a standard of morals much more articulate and detailed than that, we want a code setting forth the rules that make for the highest good. Here, the experience of the race comes to our aid. For more centuries, for more millenniums than science has yet counted, mankind have been slowly growing toward the light of the higher life. All this time they have been learning by experience what is good for them. For the most part their experience is a vast, vague, impersonal store of unconscious instinct and habit. But sometimes it becomes articulate; and all words that truly express it are an everlasting possession. Such are many of the utterances of prophets and great religious teachers. They are not discoveries, like the revelations of science. They are not inventions, like the schemes of politicians. These great and immortal utterances are only the secretion, in a definite form, of the previously vague and unconscious experience of humanity in the quest of the highest good. You know how in a strong solution of any substance—zinc, for instance—the dissolved solid tends to crystallise round any hard points thrust into the saturated liquid. Just so, when human experience has become pregnant with great moral principles, existing in solution as it were, the birth into the world of some marked personality causes a crystallisation of unrecognised truth about the gifted soul. Such truths once uttered answer to the prepared hearts of men. They bring their own evidence with them. They are stored up in human memory. They are enshrined in sacred books, along with many perishable superstitions. And these books become the treasury of moral wisdom. They need not be final or

infallible. They may be mixtures of truth and error. But the truths commend themselves to every age by answering to experience; and the errors perish, because experience convicts them.

In this way the moral standard based on experience takes definite form, but a form always capable of further development. Many races have possessed such books. The Vedas, the Avesta, the Buddhist Pitakas, the Koran, are instances of what I mean. And if to these I add the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, I shall not conceal my own profound conviction that the vaster fulness of the moral life they inspire goes far to account for the higher range of the civilisation they have moulded. But in all these writings alike, the moral wisdom and goodness of many ages have been crystallised in popular language. They are all alike clouded with exhalations of ancient ignorance and passion; but amidst the rifts of those clouds their words of truth and justice shine like the stars with their own light. Such words want no proving. The simplest heart feels in them a wealth of concentrated experience that joins past, present, and future in an everlasting life. But if still some test is craved, it is fresh experience alone that can prove them, and by this test the noblest utterances are always most conspicuously confirmed. "*Thou shalt not steal.*" "*Thou shalt do no murder.*" "*Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you.*" "*Blessed are the peacemakers.*" "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*" A nation hankering after a spirited foreign policy despises old-fashioned wisdom like this, and scornfully defies the warning voices that have echoed it from centuries of calamity. But it is not

long before the bloodshed, and the waste, and the debt, and the world-wide suspicion incurred bring the inevitable confirmation of immortal truth; and in remorseful self-condemnation men learn again that the higher morality meant the wider good.

Besides the standard of right we want an authoritative sanction. For that is no morality which does not bind us even against our lower inclinations. But we have already anticipated the sanction, in showing that the test of moral truth is experience. It is so, because the sanction of morality lies in the order of the universe. The world is so framed that, in the long run, truth and right must come uppermost. Try it, and you will see. Some worshipper of the great idol Humbug may say that he *has* tried, and that he finds this sort of idolatry pays best. Oh, yes, you may play tricks, and you may tell lies, and conceal your crimes, and you may think you have cheated eternal law. But the very fact that you do think so is part of your punishment. For you are degraded, and you have lost your self-respect. You have no safety but in meannesses and deceptions. You may brave it out; but you are a pitiful creature, and you know it. You have a shrewd suspicion that if you escape it will only be because you die before the deluge comes. For as *Punch*—often as wise as he is genial—once said in homely expostulation with slave-holding America, some years before the curse came down:

> "If those eternal laws you spurn,
> They'll certainly your kicks return.
> They *will* be even with you yet;
> And what a kicking you will get!"

Heaven forbid I should ignore the fact that many—

perhaps almost all—of the noblest men I have known would prefer to describe the sanction of morality in other and more theological terms! I am not here to controvert them, nor do I conceal my sympathy with them. But I am dealing with democratic morals, and I must find a sanction capable, at least in practice, of operating altogether outside theological controversy. This sanction we have in the order of the universe. And if any doubt that, all we have to say to them is,—try it. "Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other." In the course of a thousand generations men have found that in a universe of order an ordered life is best, and the lessons of morality are guaranteed by a perception of everlasting law.*

Similar observations might be made on the inspiration necessary to make the moral standard and its sanction effective. We may know what is right and we may realise its authority, while at the same time we may have no impulse to do it. This is the case, for instance, with all lazy electors, who know that education is the one lever of justice for the million, but who will not take the trouble to go and vote for the right men at the election of a school board. It is the case with those that know that organisation is necessary to the maintenance of a policy of righteousness, but who will not spare an hour in a month away from their cosy firesides to help it. Perhaps we have almost left behind us questions of life or death, and of high heroics,

* If I am asked whether I think this consistent with atheism, I reply, No; I do not. But I never met with an atheist yet, except in the sense of a man whose God is not recognisable as mine—*i.e.*, whose idea of eternal being and power is other than mine. In this sense Polycarp was an atheist to the Smyrnæans.

in the political conflict. But it is not moments of most intense excitement that stand most in need of inspiration, because they usually bring their inspiration with them. Those moments are only made by some strong impulse lifting a people above selfish interests. On the other hand, the level round of common duty that every member of a democracy must be content to tread, if the Commonwealth is to be kept healthy, requires an unfailing impulse of loyalty. And this can only be secured in proportion as the instinct of corporate devotion is developed. Here I shall refrain, as far as possible, from going over old ground. In dealing formerly with "The Sources of Popular Enthusiasm" * we saw, I hope, that devotion to any whole of which we form a part is essentially of the nature of religion, and susceptible to prophetic fire. The moral side of elementary education has hitherto been lacking in the cultivation of this spirit. The interests of theology have been allowed to override those of religion. And thus, while children have been drilled to answer test questions on the Deluge and the migrations of Abraham, "the weighter matters of law, judgment, mercy, and truth" have been lightly passed by. There is no book so full of democratic inspiration as the New Testament. From it Mazzini drew the fire with which he kindled his countrymen. But, used in the schools as a book of the churches, and not of humanity, it is too often made to teach a poor, withered, and emasculated Christianity. If our children heard less about miracles and metaphysics, but more about the "many members in one body," more about the new humanity abolishing the

* "Lessons from the English Commonwealth." Lecture V.

hatreds of "Greek and Jew, Barbarian, Scythian, bond or free," we should have less sectarianism and more susceptibility to political enthusiasm. When will church bells tune themselves to the appeal of the poet?

> "Ring in the valiant man and free,
> The larger heart, the kindlier hand;
> Ring out the darkness of the land;
> Ring in the Christ that is to be!"

At all events, while political party spirit should have no place in religion devotion to the common good ought to be one of its foremost lessons. And school board constituencies that fail to insist on this have not realised either their powers or their responsibilities.

This review of the standard, the sanction, and the inspiration of right-doing surely suggests considerable hope of democratic morals in the future. For the greatest good of humanity is far more likely to be an object of desire where a sense of equality prevails, than where unjust privilege excites envy, and sets class against class. Granting the spread of education, the order of the universe is most likely to command the awe of men where the apprehension of a common brotherhood and common destinies brightens the sense of an Eternal Power reigning yesterday, to-day, and for ever. And where is the inspiration of loyalty likely to be so strong, as where the one principle embodied in every institution of the commonwealth is that each man lives for all and all for each?

But we have not only abstract theory to go upon. For history, when rightly interpreted, confirms our faith. Only it should be remembered that democracy, in any strict interpretation of the term, is a new thing in the

world. The Greek States that furnished us with the word were, in reality, oligarchies of the narrowest and most exclusive kind. For example, when Athens was at the summit of her glory, some thirty thousand privileged Athenian citizens ruled with absolute power over about two million subjects, who had no voice in determining their own destinies. Under the Roman Republic the efforts of the plebeians to break through their political bondage afford one of the most interesting and instructive studies in all history. But the lust of foreign conquest diverted the course of Roman development, and before the republic became a true democracy it degenerated into an empire. In fact, I know of no genuine democracy, as distinguished from an oligarchy, before the Swiss Federation. For even the Italian republics of the middle ages were swayed by privilege. But in Switzerland equal rights prevailed; and in the character of that federation I do not think that democracy has anything to be ashamed of. I have spoken already of the American democracy, and have explained in what sense I consider its example as hopeful. But, after all, our own country is most familiar; and it is matter of uncontrovertible history, patent on every record, that the decrease of bribery and corruption, the growth of political principle, and the increasing importance of personal character in public life, have proceeded equally, step by step, with the progress of democracy. The votes of members of Parliament used to have their price in money; they afterwards had their price in place and patronage; but, thank Heaven, they are scarcely to be bought at all now; and the change has been wrought in almost strict proportion to the advance of popular power.

Nor is the change confined to representatives. That man must be unsusceptible indeed to sympathy with his times who does not realise how much more widely spread is political intelligence now than it was twenty-five years ago; and not intelligence only, but high political principle as well.

What, then, is the reason of the forebodings and fears that trouble pious hearts at the progress of democracy? What is the bearing of the invectives we hear against democratic rapacity and greed? There is no conscious injustice in these irate utterances. The speakers and writers of them are profoundly convinced that any curtailment of landlord privilege and power must needs be an act of spoliation. But we have to bear in mind the effect of custom and habit in obscuring considerations of equity. Take, for instance, the sale of church livings. It is only recently that the consciences of patrons have been troubled about the sale of next presentations. And advowsons are still regarded as a properly marketable commodity. Yet one would suppose that so serious a responsibility as that of appointing a man to lead a whole parish to heaven or hell ought to be regarded as something altogether above the possibility of mercenary bargain. But by thinking only of the temporalities, owners persuade themselves that the right of presentation to a good thing is fairly marketable. The spiritual responsibility is ignored; and custom obscures equity, so that the legal suppression of patronage, without compensation to patrons, would be regarded as robbery. Yet, surely, if an unsophisticated conscience were confronted with such transactions for the first time, it is the existing system that would appear immoral. Its

suppression would be obvious justice, and any attempt to compensate traffickers in holy offices would seem a condonation of sacrilege. But it is not in the Church only that this eclipse of equity by custom and habit occurs. In the political and social world a hundred ancient wrongs are claimed as rights; and then, of course, those who attack them are condemned as robbers. Remember the case of Ireland. Twenty-five years ago it was considered a matter of course that the reclaimer of a bit of bog should pay rent to the landlord for the increased value that the poor man's labour had created. And when this iniquitous system was partially stopped, a cry was raised that the landlord was being plundered. But public opinion decided rightly that precisely the reverse of this was the case. It was the tenant who had been plundered; it was the landlord who, all unconsciously, was the robber. And the so-called act of spoliation was only an imperfect atonement for the wrongs of centuries.

There are many analogous wrongs in Great Britain; and we should not be surprised if attempts to right them are quoted as proofs of the immoral tendencies of democracy. Take the case of church property. It is surely a flagrant injustice that the stored wealth of our ancestors, enormously increased by the common labours of all Englishmen in this industrial age, should be absorbed by a sectarian community which to our pious forefathers would have appeared a schism and an apostacy. It is surely a wrong, both to their memory and to their children, that their benefactions should thus be diverted from the general good, to which, in their blundering way, they wished to devote them. Equity clearly suggests that, as the

religious purpose they intended has become an anachronism, we should still fulfil their desire to benefit the whole community, by diverting their bequests to secular uses. But here again, so blinding are the blinkers of habit, that this plain and palpable justice is denounced as an instance of radical immorality. I shall not multiply illustrations. The land laws, the game laws, building leases, and the inequalities of taxation and rating would supply illustrations by the dozen. But they are needless. We have said enough to explain how it is that a democratic policy sometimes gets a bad name without deserving it.

On the other hand, we should undoubtedly be on our guard against short cuts to public good through injustice to individuals. For, after all, the commonwealth is the aggregate of individual rights and duties, limited and modified by mutual relationship. To disregard the just right of one man is therefore to disregard the rights of all, and a wrong to the commonwealth. For if you disregard individual right for the sake of convenience in one case, it only requires a little more pressure and you will disregard it in others as well. And then the security for labour and its reward is undermined. If one man by honest industry makes a hundred pounds, and another man by equally honest industry makes a million, you cannot confiscate five hundred thousand pounds from the savings of the millionaire without shaking the security of the poorer man's hundred. And those who talk of sequestrating all land rents for public use too often forget that the chief securities of poor men's benefit societies are in land. The day that saw such a deed done would witness the bankruptcy of all the insurance companies and chief benefit societies in the

country. Graduated taxation, increasing in proportion to the amount of each man's surplus wealth, is justifiable, though difficult to carry out. And the succession duties may fairly appropriate a considerably larger proportion of great fortunes than of small ones. But even such arrangements ought to be brought about gradually, so that every one may know the conditions under which property is to be acquired and transferred.

We may have every confidence that the democracy now entering upon the fulness of its powers will treat such questions with reason and fairness. For it is not a revolutionary mob. It is not a crowd of sciolists and sentimentalists, bitten with a philosophical frenzy. It is not a horde of backwoodsmen laying down on virgin soil the theoretic sketch of an ideal state. It is simply the latest generation of Englishmen, embodying in their traditions and associations the national life that has endured for a thousand years, and is now more vigorous, more expansive, and more intensely true to itself than ever before. This democracy, so trained by experience, so practised in policy, so inspired by religion, so exercised in freedom, so disciplined in willing order, so fearless in enterprise, is a human organization such as the world has never seen before. The Swiss Federation is narrow and poor compared with it. The United States are in raw youth, and dazzled with a new world. Their future, indeed, is immeasurable. But for the present there is no democracy that has at once the opportunities and the ripened fitness of the British Commonwealth. I will not fear either for its justice or its courage. It will not tolerate unnatural and factitious inequalities. But it will never dream

of planing all human faculties and possessions down to a dead level. We are not speaking of any one class or section of the community. We are speaking of the whole people, gentle and simple, rich and poor. And we may be confident that, as their forefathers have adapted themselves to the successive conditions of progress, so the present and coming generation will live up to the demands of a peaceful revolution. But the greatest demands will be made on their moral energy. For the signs of the times point toward the diminution of all extremes, whether of poverty or wealth, and the establishment of a more evenly tempered commonwealth, wherein all shall, as far as possible, possess an equal interest, and each shall be more consciously dependent on every other for opportunity, order, and peace.

Whether the blessings of that better age shall be reaped sooner or later depends very much on the attitude and conduct of those whom accident or enterprise pushes to the front amongst the multitude. If they are violent, overbearing, unreasonable, they may interpose a brief period of chaos between the old order and the new. If they should temporize, and negotiate for doles instead of justice, they may delay indefinitely the fate of ancient forms of wrong. If they should be ambitious and self-seeking, they may paralyse progress for awhile by discords and divisions. But if the time should ever come when all, or almost all, men shall realise how the supremest joy of life is to be conscious of having done something, however little, for the good of humanity, then will have dawned that redeemed world, that commonwealth of man, which is the same thing as the kingdom of God.

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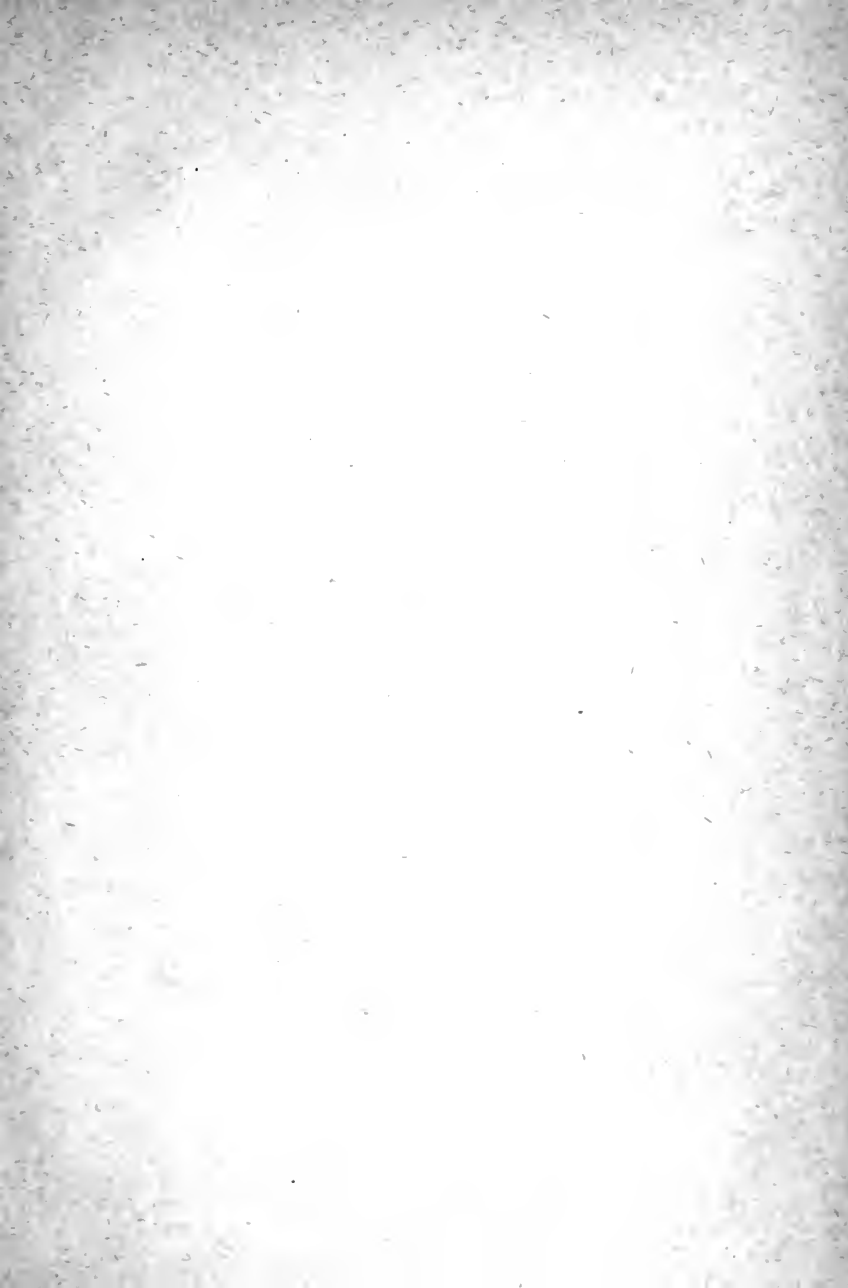

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