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The Bulletin

SATURDAY, AUGUST 11, 1888.

The Coming Revolution.

In a dialogue on "Political Optimism" which appeared in the August number of the NINETEENTH CENTURY just eight years ago, was the following passage:

"We see that political systems in all progressive societies tend towards socialism democracy. We see everywhere that it almost comes to this: We all of us feel this conviction—or all of us, I suppose, who have reflected on the matter. We feel, too, that nothing we can do can avert or possibly long delay the consummation. Then, we must believe that the movement is being guided, or is guiding itself, to happy issues."

LAURENCE GROLUND, commenting on this extract, points out that the present industrial, social, and political system of Great Britain is based on the manufacturing monopoly of England. With the encroachment of other nations into a domain for at least a century peculiarly sacred to herself alone, the industrial, social, and political structure, which has been sung by poets, which has given oratory its theme and which has inspired patriotism to yield life and substance in its defence, must fall clattering to the ground; but from the debris the new social order will be evolved, better adapted to fulfil the demands of fresh conditions—nobler, fairer, stronger and more beautiful than the system which it will replace.

"This," says the man who has become accustomed to a close regard of his own century, his own life, his own few years of active warfare with the world, "this is sheer optimism. It is a dream of Utopia." Hold! Visions have often proved prophetic. The unbounded extravagance of one age has been the sober reality of another. Evolution is not altogether a hypothesis, and history tends much evidence in support of DARWIN. "The records of our race are a series of makings ready." Capital, like AARON'S serpent, bids fair to swallow all else. It is a terrible absorbent, and under existing conditions nothing can check its growth. Along the whole line of production, transportation, exchange, and distribution, Concentration is the one unmistakable feature of modern traffic. The WHIRLWIND of the earth, in other places than Westbourne Grove, London, are absorbing now the smaller amount, what would have been accounted in a past decade the big firms. Wholesale trade is reduced to one of the exact sciences—reduced, it is elevated to the place of the highest among the exact sciences, and the science is gastronomic. Like the ostrich, wholesale trade has become acrobatic in the art of swallowing—and it swallows everything. In America—says and Australia too, for that matter—the little farm is not. The train bowls for leagues along through the bonanza estates which were once small holdings. The emporium undersells the little shop until its keeper is driven bankrupt and his competition is no longer of consequence. In every branch of trade Concentration is going

... Capital is slowly drifting into a single pair of hands, and these people who manage to suck nutrition from the golden stream on its passage have the meagre satisfaction of knowing that they are slightly better off than the poor wretches who, faint with cold and hunger, cannot approach its banks to moisten their pallid lips.

The present industrial era is without parallel in the history of the world. Never till now did Plutocracy absolutely and actually govern the whole earth. Never till now was there ever such a thing as Capital. We do not mean that there was no wealth, no property, no luxury on the part of the rich, no unscrupulous interest in the part of money-brokers, no unjust taxation. We mean that with the beginning of this present industrial era wealth was, for the first time, "employed productively" in the application of class by class, "with a view to profits by the sale of produce." For the first time in the history of humanity Free Competition has been used as a lever to increase the profits of a distinct class of non-tolerated known as Capitalists, who have extended its use amongst themselves to destroy the opposition of those small traders whose existence threatened the institution of Labour—that homeless, landless, footless mass; the whole being held on sufferance of Capital on condition of making the "profits" that flow into the great gulf-stream of wealth which is surging onwards from countless myriads into a single pair of hands. We say that the golden current will never reach the owner of the sheaves—of a MIDAS of commerce beside whom JAY GOULD and MACKAY would appear but as the veriest pigmies. A great social movement has been running parallel with it, gaining strength from year to year. The Coming Revolution is already here. It began with the building of the first factory. It generated spontaneously with the first corner in wheat. Day by day its flood courses widened. Before Capital reached its undivided destination the Social Movement will sweep over it with the strength of a mighty inundation. No world would be possible which contained the anomaly of a single CRUSTRUS. The human theory of compromise could not tolerate the *reductio ad absurdum* of benevolence—"The greatest good of the smallest possible number."

Objectors to any change in the existing condition of things fatuously exclaim: "If you divided all the wealth of the world to-morrow and gave everyone an equal share, it would in a few years be just like it is at present." Undoubtedly, but the objectors err when they lay the blame on the back of human nature. Selfishness is the unvarying product of the fear of want, and the fear of want will always influence men under a system in which Free Competition is the motive force of action. It is the system which is wrong, and no permanent amelioration for the vast majority of humanity can be hoped for until the system is altered. There is no brotherhood between Capital and Labour, any more than there is a common interest between the vampire and the sleeping Indian. Capital grows by biting into the vitals of Labour. Labour strives to maintain its integrity by resisting the encroachments of Capital in the attempt to filch the results of the operations of Labour on the sources of production. In such a one-sided contest the weaker is bound to go to the wall. Labour is engaged in an unequal battle, for its enemy fights with Labour's own stored strength. Like ATLAS, Labour is held aloft in the octopus grip of its adversary and cannot touch that source of all its vigour—the earth. Abolish this distinction between Capital and Labour, make them one, and humanity's future is straightway rosy with the dawn of a new hope. We must abolish not a class but a system. The establishment of state co-operation, the nationalisation of the land, the communication of all the forces of production are the planks of the new platform. And the men of the present generation must work to this end or civilisation must perish from off the face of the earth.

A fresh distribution of wealth with a continuation of the old conditions would simply mean a re-experiencing of the hideous past experience, a renewal of the awful struggle which has made the Nineteenth Century a tale of horror, a dreadful nightmare-dream in the life of the human race. On every hand, things are growing worse—and must. Wealth reveals without labour, without sowing as much as the superfine skin of its lily-white hands, in everything that makes life pleasant and desirable. The director drinks his champagne, while the mine-serf toils at the risk of his life in the bowels of the earth to pay for it. The wife of the speculative monopolist—that parasite of Labour—glides through the masses of a waltz, pranked in sheeny silks and glittering with gems, while the white wage-slave drudges in dirt with all his intellectual and moral faculties blunted and destroyed by the demon of Free Competition. Hungry men fight and struggle in the gutter of want with their hands at each other's throat in a pitiful scuffle to catch the dribbles of superfluity that fall from the rich man's table and which the hound that lies on LOUCHEUX' heart-rug would spurn in its dainties. Food, the source of strength, is daily becoming dearer; manufactured articles, the objects that engage the attention of the well-fed, are produced at lower cost with each passing moment.

This present era is the era of absolute and psychological want. Relative poverty men have always known, but relative poverty is easily borne. It consists simply in the inability to indulge in that which is not imperatively necessary to the proper sustenance of the functions of life. To be absolutely poor is to be unable to purchase the food, the rest, and sleep without which life is not. Capital in this age controls the sources of food; to obtain it Labour is compelled to cheapen the cost of its operations correlatively with the reduced cost of manufactured articles, while food, so absolutely necessary, is all the time growing correspondingly more difficult to procure. And still the struggle goes on! Happiness is a neglected end; the material prosperity of the few is everything. Political Economy has but a single problem—the procurement and increase of wealth. Politics are employed to assist in the art of transferring it from the many little to the big few. JEREMY BENTHAM'S axiom of "the greatest good of the greatest number" is lost to sight, and men prize of justice in a land where the happiness of the hundred has to give place to the luxury of one. HENRY GEORGE, in one of his economic works, truly says: "That the masses of men are robbed of their earnings by the payment of a wage for a very meagre power living than they ought to get—to my mind ever."

"Clear!" It is dazzling in its transparent obviousness; yet still the wheels grind on!

In one of those clear cut essays which have made the reputation of the English Positivist world-wide, FREDERIC HARRISON insists that the welfare of the State depends on what the lives of its working-classes are like. And what are they like? Visit the feverous alley and the festering slum if you would know. Visit the hovels where dwell the makers of wealth they never share, the suppliers of wants they are supposed never to feel, but which are the same in serf and sovereign. People meet the earnest warnings of science and philosophy with scorn as superfluous as insistent. They square their consciences by quoting Scripture and imagine they have solved the most tremendous problem of the age by a phrase borrowed from the Bible: "The poor ye have always with you." True; but not the poor of this Nineteenth Century. There never were at any period of the world's habitation by man such appalling contrasts between rich and poor as at present. The differences have never before now been so prominent, so hideously painful, so awful and so strongly marked. We live in a period in which the superficial has dwindled into a line, and the line threatens to terminate in a point.

Things are so bad, the outlook for humanity is so black, that it tasks severely all a strong man's resolution not to surrender the last faint fancied ray of hope as mere *ignis fatuus*, a deceptive will-o'-the-wisp. Many do lose heart and trudge onward to the grave in apathy. They feel that Free Competition destroys more lives than the most terrible war conceivable. Pessimism sees nothing ahead but the gloom of despair and the eternal blackness of the tomb; but the pessimists are only a section. There are those with a faith as intense as that of the early Christians who refuse to accept the lie of the "iron law of wages" which Political Economy offers in lieu of bread to a starving world. They hear a cry which comes up from the hovels, mingled with the moans of children and suffering women, hoarse with hunger and harsh with hate: "Give us bread!" And humanity flings down the gaude and gew-gaws that it fought for in the past to enlist in the new cause. Religion no longer welcomes the starving homeless vagabond. The shelter and shade of the Cross is monopolised by the gilded magnates of the land, while Art contends with Literature the privilege of smoothing the velvet pillows of wealthy leisure. Yet the few, the MURKINS, the HYMNIMANS, the HENRY GEORGES, and ELISER RUCKELSHAUF of the race, marshal the ranks of the social army, repeating words of hope, and instilling the maxims that are more powerful for victory than arsenals or battalions. Every day the enemy is getting weaker and fewer—and richer. Every day the army of the needy is growing in numbers. And the struggle for social equality occupies every energy of modern man. Just as in the Middle Ages religion was the motive force of action, just as in the latter part of the last century and in the beginning of the present the nations of the world were aroused by a sense of the abstract needs of intellectual enlightenment, and engaged in a battle for political liberty, so in our age do they strive to adjust the inequalities of our social condition to the demands of that justice which is the outcome of culture and humanity. The spread of the gospel of Islam in the name of the prophet, the search for the Golden Fleece, the pursuit of honour and glory in the wars with the Saracens, the rescue of the Holy Sepulchre, the discovery of America and the Indies, never awakened such wholesome and genuine enthusiasm, never engrossed the lives and faculties of our best thinkers and most active philanthropists, never held up such visions of the future than the seemingly hopeless and prosaic attempt to realise a period when psychologic want should be unknown; yet the rapid development of events in Russia and the astounding universality with which the world leapt forward to listen to the teachings of HENRY GEORGE, ought to con-

vince us that the Coming Revolution is already here—the muffled tramping of its army can be distinguished amid the noises of the night, and in our streets, though faintly, may be heard the rattle of side arm and the reveille-rummings of the drums proclaiming a new day-dawn for humanity.

Irrigation.

A RESOLUTION passed through the New South Wales Assembly the other night affirming the desirability of conserving water for the purposes of irrigation. In a country which lies in the Southern Hemisphere, subject to a variable rainfall, and seasons of drought succeeded by seasons of flood, some such system for the conservation of a national water-supply is not only indispensable, it is absolutely imperative. It is all very well for the opponents of State responsibility in the matter to urge that although the resources of the country are not adequately developed without a system of scientific irrigation, yet at the same time it is not just to saddle the community at large with heavy debts incurred either in raising the value of private property or for the benefit of leaseholders. That is not the question. Would not the community as a whole receive a benefit from the national system of irrigation proportionately to the benefit received by the community from the furtherance of every other national work, notwithstanding the present conditions that regulate the accumulation of capital in the hands of a few, and the absorption of vast estates by populations in private property? To argue otherwise would be to regard as wasteful the postponement of every act of national legislation until the country had obtained a full measure of Land Nationalisation. This is the contention of those who would put aside the consideration of a question like Protection in favour of an ultimate and possibly long-drawn-out realization of the theories of HENRY GEORGE. On the same ground, railways should not be built until the land of the country was nationalised, because railways increase the value of private property in land, and it would be just as logical to tax the property holders for the construction of railways as it would be to tax them for the construction of public works. On the other hand, some one may say that the State undertake the work of irrigating the country on scientific principles, but those leaseholders who desire irrigation should be prepared to pay the expense of maintenance on its introduction. It would be a lump sum, or at least a yearly contribution proportioned to the area irrigated; while in the districts where there is no land, the whole expenses of initiation and support should be borne by those who alone are directly benefited by it. But this would not do its good expected. It is not the State's business to provide irrigation for any private individual who may want it. It is the State's business to provide irrigation wherever it may be required, without any reference whatever to individual wants, for irrigation is not a personal luxury so much as a State necessity. If it were left to the individual to say whether he wanted irrigation or not, the wealthier would have the greater advantage—the poor man limiting the area of water to what he had to the measure of his pocket. Again, it would be decidedly unjust. Some land with all the advantages of irrigation cannot be made so productive as the alluvial flats that fringe the banks of rivers in rainy districts—in most cases in New South Wales, at all events, also nearer market—and irrigated by Nature. The water would have a pronounced advantage over the farmers in less favoured localities, and if the State proposed to equalise conditions by taxing the latter, why not extend the tax, on the Georgican principle, over the whole country, absorbing the unimproved value of land, and taxing the State accordingly. In such a case the State could not irrigate as the country required it, not invidiously distinction that pressed heavily on a man who was forced to select in a waterless district, hundreds of miles from the sea-coast.

The opponents of irrigation received the remark of MR. DRANTER, in the New South Wales Assembly, who, while speaking on the question of State irrigation quoted (as showing how it might be made beneficial to the country) a case in which a certain estate of 200 acres was irrigated. The ultra anti-irrigationists, no doubt the hon. member considered that the owner of this land was perfectly entitled to reap the unearned increment conferred by the expenditure of public money, but to the selector the land question was the question of the private property of all adventitious rises in value by such means is iniquitous and differs but little from a bold dipping of the hand into the public purse. No doubt, but while we permit men to absorb the unearned increment in city and suburban lots, in mortgage property, in speculative swindles of all sorts, in the State system of reform in the least reprehensible direction. Under existing conditions a man is entitled to reap any additional advantage or value put upon his property by State expenditure, and the only way to combat this right is the introduction of a full measure of Land Nationalisation. That would be all talk about a special irrigation tax, which would be fair, for the principle of the single tax applies to all unimproved values in land.

But this is only a partial aspect of the question. People are clamouring for settlement upon the land; hundreds of useless men and women crowd into the sea-coast cities and lack the means of transportation to the interior, or they mean to procure a living when they get there. Immense stretches of barren land are hungering for labour, for water, for railways. An immense inland tract, rich in minerals and into a garden is now devoted to raising a few sheep and supporting one or two families in giving balls and parties in London or in Paris. The country wants not one act of legislation which will conduce to settlement but a hundred—at least a dozen. Big estates must be taxed until they are burnt up. The selector must have land on easy terms and the State must pay for it—if need be the State should advance funds for the working of his holding, providing him with seed and tools at a minimum cost. Water must be introduced for the sake of the country. Crops cannot be raised in dry, unblistered soil, parched and thirsting for rain or its equivalent. Railways must be extended in order that the selector may be able to convey his produce to market. Settlement without irrigation, railways, and an easy market is a ludicrous and irritating farce, and all the while the State stands by with its hands in its pockets this seems to be the only sort of settlement such countries as New South Wales seem likely to get. As for the nominees of the present system and the advantages they are at present on speculative landholder, the State at present can do nothing. Land Nationalisation and Land Nationalisation alone is the equitable remedy. The system is to blame, not the individual, and until the system is altered all works for the public

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