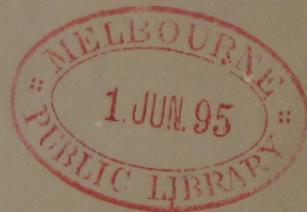




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The Root of the Matter.

Being a  
Series of Dialogues on Social Questions.



BY

H. H. CHAMPION.

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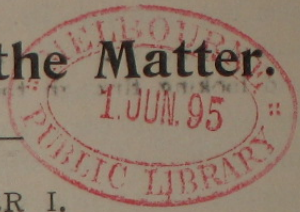
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Yes, the man's thought and my thought, which is more—  
One made to love you, let the world take note !  
Have I done worthy work ? be love's the praise,  
Though hampered by restrictions, barred against  
By set forms, blinded by forced secresies !  
Set free my love, and see what love can do  
Shown in my life—what work will spring from that !  
The world is used to have its business done  
On other grounds, find great effects produced  
For power's sake, fame's sake, motives in men's mouths.  
So, good : but let my low ground shame their high !  
Truth is the strong thing. Let man's life be true !  
And love's the truth of mine. Time prove the rest !  
I choose to wear you stamped all over me,  
Your name upon my forehead and my breast—  
You, from the sword's blade to the ribbon's edge—  
That men may see, all over, you in me—  
That pale loves may die out of their pretence  
In face of mine, shames thrown on love fall off.

ROBERT BROWNING.



# The Root of the Matter.



## CHAPTER I.

**A**T the far end of Maida Vale, before you get to the wilds of Kilburn and Brondesbury, "down Hendon way," if you turn off to the right in the direction of St. John's Wood, you find yourself in a maze of short streets curving into one another in a manner that confuses your mind as to the points of the compass. In one of these streets the small detached villas are concealed from the view of the passers-by behind high brick walls, grimed even in that most open and airy part of the inner circle of the metropolis by coatings of London soot. Above there can be seen in the springtime the fresh green of the young foliage, clusters of lilac and the flowery frost of the may. In the early morning the sward between walls and housefront, though it is no longer than a cricket pitch, is the happy hunting ground of the wise thrush and fluting blackbird. On the door leading to one of the smallest of these villas gleams a brass plate bearing the inscription, "Frederick Burton, M.D."

If you had rung the bell at that dark green garden door at 9 o'clock one morning in May, 1894, you would have heard the click which announces the release of the



latch by a wire pulled in the house, and the door swinging back on its hinges would have shown you, under the arch formed by the hawthorn that grows out over the pathway, Dr. Burton sitting on the garden seat outside of the French window of the front room and looking through the daily paper while he waited for his sister to come down to breakfast. He was tall and dark, and his strongly marked features, close-cropped black whiskers of formal cut, and professional air of gravity made him look much more than his eight and twenty years. After half a dozen voyages to Australia and back as surgeon on a mail steamer, he had bought a small practice and settled down in his semi-rural retreat to make a home for his sister Ida, his only relative, who had just left Girton. She had been on the previous evening to a fancy-dress dance at the Westminster Town Hall, given by a football club, of which the brothers of her greatest college friend were members. In consequence she was disgracefully late for breakfast. But Dr. Burton bore it patiently, for, proud though he was of the learning which made his sister a congenial companion to him, it pleased him still more that she danced beautifully, and had had all the waltzing her heart could desire. When she came down at last he saw that she had really enjoyed herself. They chatted gaily over breakfast about her partners, her chaperone, and her programme, which she dutifully handed over to her brother's inspection.

"Who is this 'G.B.,' whose superscription I see down here three—no, four times, Ida?" asked Dr. Burton in a mischievous tone.

"Shocking, wasn't it?" responded his sister as she

poured out the coffee, "and there was another that is not down at all—an 'extra' at the end—so you may be sure at least he could dance. And 'worse remains behind,' for I have asked him to come and see us, so that although you know him already you are likely to know him better."

"I can't remember any man of my acquaintance with the initials G.B."

"I didn't say you were acquainted with him, but you know him, for he is a most notorious person. He's just the sort of man you'd like to talk to, moreover, for he's a specialist, and seems to me to know his own subject remarkably well, even though I disagreed with his strong views upon it. Try and guess who he is."

"But you don't mean to say you talked 'shop' with this notorious specialist half the night, Ida, and then begged him to come here and bore me with it? Good Heavens! it isn't an anti-vivisectionist, is it?"

"No, we didn't talk shop at first. He was just introduced to me, and of course I didn't catch his name. He danced very well, and I suppose he thought I did too, for after our first waltz he scribbled his 'G.B.' all over my programme and walked off. I did not discover who he was until nearly the end. Then we squabbled like anything, and it ended as I told you."

"Well, who is this amiable scientist who quarrels over his hobbies after waltzing his partners off their feet?"

"If you can't guess I must tell you. It was George Blake."



"Ida!" shouted the doctor, dropping his egg spoon with a clatter. "George Blake, the agitator, the Socialist spouter?"

"The very same, only I don't know whether he is all you think him. He seemed very nice or I would not have asked him to call."

"No doubt. 'The mildest mannered man' who ever scuttled the ship of State. My dear, you know I don't want to come the elder brother over you or to control your perfect liberty to do as you please, but I do think you have been foolish this time."

"But, Fred, the man is a gentleman. You can at least trust my judgment in that? He is nice, too, and interesting——"

"Oh interesting enough, doubtless. So were the gentlemen whose effigies fill our national Walhalla, the Chamber of Horrors. How could you, Ida?"

"Now, Fred, dear," said his sister coming round the table and putting one arm round his neck, and leaning her cheek against his shoulder, thereby suspending his further operations on the untasted egg on his plate, "don't be stupid. I thought yesterday as you think, and very likely if I'd known who 'G.B.' was at first I would have avoided dancing with him. But I got to know and like him before my hearsay knowledge of the public man had a chance to prejudice me against the private individual. You can surely take my word for it that he is not an impossible person."

"Of course," grudgingly assented her brother, "it is not flatly inconceivable that a man may hold and propagate the most pestilent opinions and yet have

decent manners, or even charming ones. There was Jack Wilkes——"

"Oh, Fred, do be serious a moment, and let me tell you. We began—I don't know how—perhaps he was sounding me—to talk about labour questions—this big strike that is just begun, that you were discussing the other night when Tom Mortimer was here—and I said something, just the sort of things you said, you know, that the men were crying for the moon and killing the goose that laid the golden eggs, and that their leaders ought to be hanged; and Mr. Blake turned on me quite furiously, and said I ought to be ashamed of myself, and that Girton should indeed be proud of turning out a girl who was utterly ignorant about the only important things that were going on in the world."

"All in the pauses of the waltz, I suppose? Charming manners your new friend has, most clearly."

"Well, Fred, you wouldn't be very excessively suave if you were dancing with some girl who happened to be a President of the Anti-Vivisectionist League and trod on your corns. Besides, you see, it was true. I don't really know anything about these subjects, but, as I told Mr. Blake, I don't see that it is exactly my fault."

"But you have read a good deal——"

"Oh, yes, I've read some political economy which hasn't left any very clear impression on my mind, and leaders in the *Times* about these things which have left an impression clear enough but possibly distorted, and bits of Ruskin and Carlyle, but they didn't seem to



have any very practical bearing. But I don't know myself anything about it, and I told Mr. Blake it was his duty to teach us, to inform the educated people who know so little about the facts of life."

"I fancy he is more in his element teaching the uneducated who can't criticise his reasons or examine his facts, but just swallow his conclusions because these appeal to them in their discontent and misery, poor devils!"

"I said he would do more good by converting half a dozen of what he calls the well-to-do-classes than by preaching to thousands of the poor, and run less risk of doing harm. He laughed, and said, 'Moses have they and the prophets,' and talked as if the rich were blinded by self-interest, and did not care to learn the truth."

"The truth, forsooth!"

"I said that we weren't rich, and that we did care for the poor, and that, even if we were prejudiced, we had brains enough to understand the truth, if it were the true truth. Then I hinted that he could not believe much in his own opinions if he doubted the possibility of making them intelligible and acceptable to people like us."

"Ah, that would touch his pride."

"I don't think it stung him, but he seemed to think over it, and at the end of the dance he talked quite seriously to me, and offered to come here and talk the whole thing out. I thought it would be delightful, and told him about you and your opinions, and Tom

Mortimer and his red-hot Toryism, and my own ideas about the advancement of women; and the upshot was that I promised to get you to write and ask him to come and discuss it with us three for a couple of evenings a week this summer."

Dr. Burton was a little staggered at the proposition, but after much coaxing was prevailed upon to go round and ask Mortimer what he thought of it. The latter was a briefless barrister who lived close by and was one of the Burton's most intimate friends. He came in very frequently in the evenings, to smoke a pipe with the doctor and chat with his sister. He was of a combative temperament, ever ready to oppose the view of any question held by the others and to argue against it with an air of the deepest conviction. Ida declared it was only done for practice in anticipation of the day when he should make the worse appear the better cause in the law court, but in fact Tom's was a critical mind, more apt to pick holes in the logic of others and to expose their fallacies than to conceive any constructive ideas of his own. He was overjoyed at the prospect of meeting a Socialist at close quarters, and having opportunities of "riddling him fore and aft," as he expressed it himself. He entered into the scheme with enthusiasm and kindled the more cautious doctor with some of his own warmth. Finally Burton returned to the little study built out at the back of the house which was destined to be the arena of conflict, and wrote what was for him quite a genial note to Blake, endorsing his sister's invitation and suggesting an early commencement of the sittings. By the return of post he got the following reply:—



Barnard's Inn, Holborn, W.C.

Dear Sir,—

I shall be very glad indeed to come and do my best to make our discussions useful and interesting, and would prefer to begin to-morrow evening, when I will come at half-past eight, prepared with a sketch of the form the symposium should take.—Yours, etc.,

GEORGE BLAKE.

At the hour named the writer of the above note was ushered into Dr. Burton's snuggerly, where he found the other three awaiting him with interest, and as far as Fred and Tom were concerned, with a large leavening of curiosity.

## CHAPTER II.

THE man who entered Dr. Burton's study was to all outward appearance very much like scores of men to be seen any day in the richer parts of London. Of middle height and age, the slightness of his figure made Blake look taller and younger than he really was, and in his neat, sober dress and quiet, self-possessed manner, there was nothing to betray enthusiasm or eccentricity. With Ida Burton, who rose to meet him, he shook hands cordially, saying, in a voice attractive from the ring of sincerity in its tones, "You see, I have been as good as my word." At once divining which of the two men was her brother, Blake turned to the doctor and holding out his hand said, "You must indeed be nearly as good a brother as Miss Burton the other night insisted you were, to fall in so readily with this unceremonious scheme. I am, honestly, very much indebted to you for your kindness, and I don't think you'll regret it. I fancy, more from

what your sister implied than what she said, perhaps, about your opinions and those of your friend here—Mr. Mortimer, isn't it? I am glad to make your acquaintance—that we shall all get a good deal of fun out of this."

This was not quite what Dr. Burton had anticipated. The manner and still more the personality of the socialist were quite different from the mental picture he had conjured up, and, as often happens to all of us when we meet someone of whom we have heard much, his mind was unable to readjust itself quickly to accept the unexpected. He was confused, and showed it by his manner as he asked Blake to take the armchair between him and Mortimer. As he sank into his seat and grasped the situation, the visitor smiled. His smile was as reassuring as his voice. The lamplight on his face showed that the keen visage was somewhat deeply furrowed with wrinkles, and that the dark close-cropped hair was turning grey. He settled himself back, and said—

"You must forgive me if I am blunt, Dr. Burton, but if we are to do any good we must be open with each other. We have not any time to lose in fencing. I can see as plainly as possible in the manner of you three excellent people that I have here on a small scale just the difficulties that meet my ideas in the great world outside. We must, for a start, get rid of our prejudices."

"But, my dear sir," began Dr. Burton apologetically, "let me assure you—"

"That you have no prejudices!" laughed Blake. "Of course, no man with a scientific training can have.



But I can see, and you'll admit, that I am not precisely what you expected. You have, naturally enough, made up your mind about me to some extent before investigating me at first hand, and that I take to be prejudice. Mr. Mortimer has done the same, I expect. As for your sister, I know she has done so, for I was mean enough to get at her prejudices before she knew who she was revealing them to. Suppose you two are now equally frank, and tell me not only what you expected, but why you expected it."

"But," objected Mortimer, "I say, you know that is hardly fair. I don't see that it would help us either."

"I'm afraid," Blake went on, "that you are going to prove my point by your reluctance to say how badly you thought of me. But it will help, for I don't think so badly of you as to suppose there is no ground whatever for your prejudices, and we shall start fair if we examine that ground a little carefully. 'Let us clear our mind of cant, gentlemen.' You, Mr. Mortimer, can't object to that sentiment of the crusted old Tory who said the devil was the first Whig. Fire away at me, and don't mind hurting my feelings."

"I hardly like to make such an unpromising beginning," pleaded the doctor.

"Then I must do it for you," persisted Blake. "But please note that I don't mind any sort of criticism. It can't hurt me if it is unjustified; if it is justified, it can do me nothing but good. Well, here's my diagnosis. The doctor has no acquaintance with me or my like, except what he gets from the newspapers. That means he has never read a word of argument, but has

fed on reports of speeches in which the orator appears to have indulged in a few sentences of heated rhetoric. Then he is a man of science, and therefore, I suspect, something of a freethinker and freetrader. I hazard a guess that he has put me down as a coarse-brained, loud-voiced man, devoid of intellectual conscientiousness, reckless and ambitious, with a great fund of ignorance and assurance—and, of course, personal appearance to match, eh?"

"You are not far out, Mr. Blake," assented the Doctor, "but I think I should have allowed that you were deceiving yourself as much as others."

"Yes, that is where my ignorance would come in. Now Mr. Mortimer, he is a man of law, of the world, of affairs. He will have been to debates, mass meetings, Parliamentary Societies, lectures and what not, and seen and heard people professing my opinions?"

"Haven't ever seen you at them though," interjected Mortimer.

"No, I have usually something better to do. Well, I imagine Mr. Mortimer, hearing I have a dress suit and can dance, will put me down as an amateur Socialist, so to speak. He will have expected a 'viewy' thing with a dreamy eye, an unkempt beard and long hair, with a beautiful tie and grimy shirt cuffs, who never looked one of the real hard facts of life in the face; who lightly waves away all the teachings of science and history, all the universal experience of human nature; who drivels about an unreal world, and satisfies his feeble soul by mouthing about 'advance,' 'progress' and 'the revolution;' who displays the same



well-tempered zeal for the nationalization of the land as for the establishment of phonetic spelling, for the abolition of contract as for the repeal of the vaccination laws; who thinks Mr. Tim Healy a finer man than Kossuth, and has for his only genuine feeling a conviction that 'he is the true cosmopolite who *hates* his native country best.'

"By Jove, I say," said Mortimer with unmistakable cordiality, "you have hit it this time, and that's a fact."

"Ah, I've seen them at close quarters, and I thought you had. Now for Miss Burton."

"But please," said Ida, "I had enough of that the other night. I really have an open mind now."

"Yes, and an enquiring one, and there you represent a very large portion of the community which knows very little about it all, has a vague sympathy with poverty and suffering, and thinks something ought to be done, only, somehow, there are such grave objections to any practical proposal, and there are so many different views, and it's all so very interesting, don't you know?"

"Oh, Mr. Blake, I'm not so horrid as that," murmured Ida resentfully.

"The best proof that I don't think so," Blake rejoined, "is my presence here to night. I haven't any time to waste on empty-headed and empty-hearted people, I assure you."

"That's a very neat way out of it," remarked Ida, "still you think I am prompted by mere idle curiosity. But

how do you happen to have so much leisure as to be able to promise to come here twice a week?"

"I shan't have much to do till the big strike is over, and it will be a couple of months, very likely, before the men are driven in. The funds will last that time."

"But aren't you going to have a say in it?" the doctor asked.

"Oh, I've had a good deal of say in it. The whole thing is worse than a crime; it's a blunder," said Blake regretfully. "They are knocking their heads against a stone wall, and the men who should have warned them are egging them on to their destruction. I've done my best to stop it."

"The deuce you have," said the doctor surprised, "and what did you do?"

"I went down to the spot, and made my inquiries. I told the leaders that they did not know what they were asking for meant; that it would do no good if they got it; and that in any case they would not win. But they were all bent on fighting."

"They always are," said the Doctor, "they live on it, and it pays them well."

"Don't you think you are a little bit prejudiced again?" asked Blake, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye. "I don't know their motives, and though I am in a better position to guess them than you are, I won't risk doing so. The fact remains that they disagreed with me, and in that no doubt they truly represented the bulk of the men."

"And did you leave it at that?" asked Tom Mortimer.



"No; I published my opinion on the whole matter in the local press, so that the men should be able to judge for themselves. A good many of them agreed with me, and at one time it seemed that I might succeed. But I had made no secret of the fact that I had called on the best of the employers in order to ascertain their side of the case. The union leaders put it about that I had been 'got at,' wheedled or bribed by the masters into taking their view. The suspicion once set going, there was no chance for my arguments. Prejudice and ignorance, you see, are among the few things the propertied classes have not been able to monopolise!"

"The brutes!" ejaculated Mortimer, "I can't think how you can take it so coolly. That's Democracy all over. You must see what a hopeless creed it is?"

"Oh no, it's merely human nature. It would be unscientific and childish to expect anything else."

"But how can you hope for anything from such people?" asked Ida.

"I rely a good deal on the last of the Beatitudes, you see—'Blessed are they that expect nothing for they shall not be disappointed.'" It would be expecting a good deal to suppose that a mass of very ignorant illiterate men, with passions inflamed and suspicions aroused, should be able to make a cool and impartial judgment on what is, after all, an intricate matter, too involved, apparently, for persons even like yourselves to comprehend readily."

"But the leaders," urged Burton, "they know better, surely!"

"Some of them do," Blake agreed; "but they are under the pressure of an overwhelming temptation to shout with the biggest crowd. 'By this craft we have our wealth,' like the silversmiths of Ephesus. It is part of the socialist creed, you know, that character is much influenced by circumstances. After all, are they any worse than most politicians?"

"Leaders!" sniffed Mortimer, contemptuously, "you remind me of the story of Lamartine's remonstrating with Ledru Rollin for not checking the excesses of his party. The cynical Frenchman replied, 'but I must follow them because I am their leader.'"

"Oh, it is vile enough, God knows!" Blake exclaimed, "and I've said many bitter things about these fellows to their faces. I don't want to excuse, but to explain, their weakness. Loss of popularity means to them loss of everything—not only of income, position and notoriety, but of the influence they no doubt persuade themselves they will use for good some day, if they can only keep it."

"And are we to suppose Mr. Blake is one of the immaculate?" Ida suggested.

"A fair hit, Miss Burton. No; I've my share of foibles, though I daresay I am human enough to dislike admitting them to my enemies. But happily my circumstances don't expose me to these particular temptations."

"Ah, you don't depend for your living, your friends, or your occupations on the good will of the mob?" asked Dr. Burton.



"Exactly, and, further, I'm blest with the temperament, or brains, or courage, or faith, or whatever you choose to call it, that allows me to think it is only a question of time—of an infinitesimal period of time in the light of what we know of the world's history—for the truth to come out and be acknowledged of all men. That is a faith that is acceptable to science, Doctor?"

"It is the only religion for an honest man," said Dr. Burton, gravely.

"It was good enough for Milton," Blake went on in a lighter tone, "and it's good enough for me."

"'Let Truth and Falsehood fairly grapple,'" quoted Mortimer, "'for who ever knew Truth to be worsted in a fair encounter?'"

"Ah," Ida broke in, "but which of us act as if we believed it?"

"Most of us are beginning to recognise it, Miss Burton," said Blake, "the extent to which we do is the real measure of our civilisation. As to acting on it—you know Latin—your question was answered long ago *Nimium timemus mortem et exilium et paupertatem.*"

"'We are too much afraid of poverty, of exile, and of death.'"

"All of us are. Some of us more than others. He who is least so is the best gentleman, and what England wants is more gentlemen."

"Excellent Tory doctrine!" proclaimed Mortimer, delighted.

"So much the better for Toryism," said Blake. "Perhaps you will help me to make all Britons gentlemen, then."

"Come now," Mortimer demanded, "one doesn't hear many socialists talk that way."

"So much the worse for Socialism then. But now you'll see what I have been driving at. You three, and people like you, approach this subject with a feeling of hostility more or less latent. It is new, it is unfamiliar, it is threatening. It seems to run counter to your habits of thought and conduct, and you want to find it absurd and bad. Every new idea attracts a number of undesirable converts, and so does Socialism. It is a kind of Cave of Adullam to which flocks 'every one that is in distress, and everyone that is in debt, and everyone that is discontented.' The disappointed and the disagreeable, the unsuccessful and the lightheaded, the visionaries and the faddists, rally to the standard of anyone who fights for a great change. It is in the nature of things. Don't you think that many of the early Christians must have been a very uncomfortable lot, and very poor representatives of their opinions? Can't you imagine how the Pharisees must have quoted Thomas and Peter and Judas as the genuine exemplars of the new religion? Or to bring the matter nearer home to you, how would Miss Burton defend the sayings and doings of the loudest of the woman's rights people? What would you two say to me if I judged the members of your profession from the not infrequent specimens of the medical fraternity who are imprisoned for illegal



practices, or of the lawyers who are disbarred or struck off the rolls every year? You know it would be all folly, and quite beside the mark."

"We should say you were consciously confusing the issue," bluntly said Mortimer.

"But that is no more," Blake went on, "than you have unconsciously been doing about Socialism. When you hear some idiotic or criminal folly rightly or wrongly ascribed to one of its advocates, your natural impulse is to think he behaves so, not because he is a knave or fool, but because he is a socialist."

"Just as the atheists say all Christians are hypocrites because they are Christians," suggested Mortimer.

"Or as religious people declare scepticism to be synonymous with evil-living," the doctor retorted.

"Or, as everyone seems so astonished, when they hear I've been to Girton," put in Ida, "to find that I'm not a thin-lipped flat-chested creature with blue stockings, spectacles on nose, a hideous dress and a contempt for man. Ugh!"

"It is pretty clear," said Blake gleefully, "that we are of one mind now on the first point. You are willing to judge Socialism by its best and not its worst exponents, and to refrain from trying to hold me responsible for all the extravagances and worse of anyone who chooses to pose as one of its apostles! That is a great deal gained."

"And now, where do we begin?" asked Ida; "I've thousands of questions to ask you—regular posers."

"I'm afraid we should not get much further that way," said Blake laughing; "I am going to suggest that you should let me commence each evening by making a statement. You may pull it to pieces after, and ask all the questions you like on it. I'm not afraid."

It was agreed that this should be done and Blake went on:

"Before I go I want to impress a few things on you that will save you a great deal of disappointment. We don't expect any very sudden great change in the social system; we suppose we see a great number of small changes continually going on in it now which other people overlook or misinterpret. We are content to ascertain the probable tendency of these changes. We don't expect any rapid improvement in human nature; we know that has altered in the past and think it will alter in the future, but we look for no sudden alteration in human motives. They will produce different results as the surroundings of men alter, that is all. Finally, I want you to try and believe that, in spite of what you may have heard, we are not actuated solely by maudlin sympathy for suffering and misery, but are first of all scientific students worshipping no ideals nor Utopias, but trying to bring to bear on sociology the same cold, impartial, truth-loving investigation which has done so much for other departments of knowledge. It is easy enough to prove that hundreds of socialists are not what I have just described. I grant all that, but I want you to judge me, not by the noisy and thoughtless, but by the patient and thoughtful, whose views I shall try to bring before you at our future meetings."



## CHAPTER III.

AT their next meeting Blake came armed with some memoranda on half a sheet of paper, and warned them that he was going to deliver a lecturette. He begged his hearers not to interrupt its delivery, but to keep their observations to the end. Then he began:—

"In spite of the tendency of all recent advances in our knowledge of the world in which we live, the human mind seems almost impervious to the idea that the one certain thing is change. We accept, it is true, the conclusion, no longer to be refuted, that all which exists is the result of innumerable series of slow and imperceptible growths in a past with which we ourselves had nothing to do; we look backwards pityingly to the days of the curfew bell, or of the sumptuary laws, or to that yesterday when men were hanged for petty larceny, and wondering how people so like ourselves in all human essentials could have accepted unquestioningly such conditions of life, admire the present. There our vision stops. All round us seems fixed, immutable. If there is change at all it is slow and trivial. We resent it if it is brought under our notice, for it brings a sense of discomfort and unrest, and we hate to have continually to be adjusting ourselves and our habits of action and thought to new conditions. More often we don't notice it; the adjustment takes place unconsciously, and before we are aware the changed condition has become familiar, and we are surprised to learn that things have not always been so."

"Even thus lived the generations of men that are gone. They built their monuments of one kind and another, and deemed that they would last for ever. Few of them grasped the fact that one day no stone would be left standing or remembered how Time turned to ridicule the Egyptian monarch who inscribed on his memorial:—

"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;  
Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair."

"Yet we know past all doubt that, to take an instance, when feudalism was at its very height, and must have seemed most firmly founded to those who lived under it, the causes of its decay were at work, and might indeed have been seen at work by a careful observer, who could have foretold its replacement by another order, even if he could not have accurately predicted the exact form of its successor. We can imagine how such a prophet would have been stoned. We can see the foolishness of the past easily enough, but when it comes to applying the lesson to ourselves it is very different. We know that ten generations hence all our laws, institutions, customs and morals will be to the men of that time subjects of scornful amusement, just as to us are now the manners of the Middle Ages; but the knowledge has not really entered into our intelligence. We are the fools of the habit of thought that 'whatever is, is right,' and has a sort of divine sanction to a perpetual lease. It is marvellous that the vast majority should accept a conclusion so at variance with all our knowledge. Possibly the reason is that man is a very lazy animal, and that it is so much easier to accept the established than to find out for oneself, or even to choose between the multitudes of new ideas, many of which must necessarily be false. Further, I fancy there is a natural shrinking from an attitude of mind which reduces the present era and all belonging to it to the position of one generation of insects building up a coral reef. It shatters the good conceit of ourselves springing from the idea most of us hold that we are 'the heirs of all the ages,' the fine flower of all evolution."

"In any case there can be no question as to the frame of mind in which to approach the matters we are going to talk about. You cannot discuss modern surgery with a man who does not know about antiseptics, or the education of women with a Mahomedan. It would be useless to expound any sociological views that claim to be scientific with people who regard our social system as a fixed and permanent structure. The beginning of wisdom in this matter is to recognise every social institution, even the most venerated and most familiar, as having been brought into being to serve some temporary end, liable to modification by the pressure of social needs, and doomed to disappear in course of time when its use has



been fulfilled. It is this conception of society as a growing organism which is the basis of the whole superstructure of modern Socialism. One must grasp and assimilate this before one can understand that socialists propose to initiate no changes and profess merely to ratify the changes that have already taken place in the constitution of society by modifying or removing the institutions it has outgrown."

There was a silence as Blake concluded. It was broken by Ida. "Oh," she said, "you take my breath away. But I like it. It seems to give one a new, comprehensive view."

"I should rather think it does," ejaculated Mortimer, "but where is it all going to stop? Is everything going into the melting pot? Are you insisting that our mental outlook is to consist of one eternal dissolving view?"

"Who is going to assign a limit to the processes of evolution?" asked Blake.

"Your question is absurd, Mortimer," broke in the doctor. "A new light breaks in upon me. What Mr. Blake says is perfectly in accord with the scientific method, and so far I am disposed to agree with him, though I have not had time to grasp the full import of his view. What does, on the face of it, strike me as wholly absurd is that he should coolly take this lofty ground, and try to persuade us that we are to recognize in the ranting, unwashed orators at the street corner, greater Darwins and Spencers, patiently applying omniscient minds to the study of the origin of the functions of the social organism and of their probable development. It is quite too audacious."

"Ah, those orators!" said Blake laughing; "how they seem to have repelled your sympathies. I fancy they wash every bit as much as you would if you were compelled by your circumstances to do the filthy work of the world. If they prated of the branches of science you have studied, you would admire them immensely for having got even a smattering of such knowledge, and find ample excuse for any extravagance and misstatement in their inevitable narrow-mindedness. Because their topic is new to you, and their creed distasteful, you find their dirty shirts and language a reason for denying them the universal privileges of the ignorant! You see our gospel is to the poor, to those who suffer most, consciously at least, from the want of correspondence between the needs of society and its forms. Consequently, the uneducated socialists outnumber the educated by a thousand to one, and our doctrines suffer a good deal in public exposition at their hands. But if you'll take the trouble to inquire you'll find that their vapourings are only reflections, from very inferior mirrors, of 'the dry light of reason' thrown on these subjects by some of the best minds of the world."

"That's all very fine," Mortimer grumbled, "but you know as well as I do that nine-tenths of what these fellows say is not only arrant nonsense, but wicked sedition. They shriek about a bloody revolution, and they do their sneaking best to stir one up. Don't think I object to reasonable argument, but I'd lock up every man jack of these agitators who set class against class for their own vile purposes if I had my way, and if we'd a Government with an atom of pluck, they'd do it."



"I suggest," said Blake drily, "that you would be happier if you took up your domicile in Russia. Things are administered there in a way that would suit your enlightened views."

"Come, now," said the doctor, "that was all settled long ago. Absolute freedom of speech, short of advocating murder, is not going to be suppressed in England, and the law, and the Government, and public feeling are quite strong enough to stop anything really dangerous. But how do you square all this desire for sudden revolution, this blather about change, as if society was a kaleidoscope, of which the components can be jerked into an entirely new pattern by a simple turn of the wrist, with your scientific talk?"

"That's one of the questions I've got down," said Ida; "I hate the way Mr. Mortimer talks. It is just what people used to say ten years ago about the Woman's Movement. But without holding Mr. Blake responsible for all the wild talk by ignorant and unscrupulous men, it does seem to me that while he argues in a reasonable way here, the whole point of all the socialist agitation is that it promises sudden change, a short cut to some kind of millennium, and that it is positively—yes—*wicked* to inflame hopes which can't in the nature of things be fulfilled. All science says so, doesn't it, and aren't you resting your case on a scientific basis?"

"Frankly there is a lot of hideous nonsense talked about Revolution," assented Blake. "I'll admit even that many socialists who ought to know better seem

deliberately to confound the two meanings of the word, to use it indifferently as signifying an uprising of physical force or a far-reaching economical change. That is wicked enough ('I should think so, indeed,' from Mortimer), but I have denounced that sort of thing time and again, and publicly, too. To English ears the word Revolution means the guillotine and the Carmagnole. But when Mr. Mortimer speaks of the recent revolution in agrarian Ireland he does not refer to the potting of landlords from behind stone walls, but to the substitution of fair rents for competition rents. When Dr. Burton says the discovery of the circulation of the blood or of the use of anæsthetics brought about a revolution in medicine and surgery, he is not referring to the victims of unskilled practitioners. When Miss Burton's text-books of political economy mention the industrial revolution of the last century, she understands them to mean not the riots against the use of machinery, but the introduction of the factory system and its consequences. That's the sort of thing the socialists mean."

"Why don't they say so, then," Mortimer asked.

"Because," retorted Blake, "they are recruited in England from a population 'mostly fools.' But the first popular tract ever issued in the modern agitation, Ferdinand Lassalle's *The Working Man's Programme*, makes this point clear, and a great part of it is devoted to showing that while you may have revolutions of the kind the socialist aims at, without any disorder, you can have abundance of riot and civil war without advancing any revolution a stage."



"But for all that," persisted Ida, "*natura non facit saltum*. There *can* be no sudden change. Science has taught me that, if it has taught me anything."

"Then I am afraid it hasn't taught you much or let me say that, like most people, you have not learnt as much from books as you might have from using your eyes. Did you ever see a chicken hatched out?"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"If you have you'll have seen at one minute the egg, at the next the eggshell in pieces and the chicken strutting about. All done in a few minutes and no deception!"

"Oh, but Mr. Blake, you know there's no magic in that. The chicken was there before. It had grown slowly, or comparatively slowly, and had only to come out."

"But you see," Blake pursued, "someone who did not know much about poultry rearing, a Girton girl, for instance, would have seen no difference in the egg a day, a week, or a fortnight before the hatching took place. The shell, you see, necessary protection though it may be to the growing organism within, hides the changes from the view of the unobservant."

"I see, I see," Ida exclaimed. "Society is the chicken and it grows slowly, but when the time is come, crack goes the shell and out comes the new development."

"Aren't you counting your chickens before they are hatched?" put in Mortimer.

"You can make pretty sure of them, I am told," responded Blake cheerfully, "if you use modern

methods such as the incubator. Seriously, the comparison is fairly apt, and explains my meaning."

"Hum!" Mortimer grumbled; "I wish I could be sure your friends were going to use incubators and not hammers, which will smash shell and chicken too!"

"That's not an unnatural anxiety, I admit," Blake said, "But I think they understand that you can only do harm by forcing natural processes."

"Ah, but there *is* physical force exerted there," said Dr. Burton. "Your chicken cracks the egg with a certain amount of violence."

"The hard shell of laws and social forms," replied Blake, "has been necessary to keep society together while it was growing, but when it has grown, if it is not to perish, the envelope must expand or break up—yield in some way to the pressure from within. All depends on the nature of the envelope. With the bud the outer casings give way at once and add a beauty to the flower after their usefulness has gone. The snake's elastic skin splits easily and is left behind. The egg shell requires a few sharp taps from a tough beak to break it. In proportion to the strength of the obstacles which natural forces meet is the violence with which they free themselves. Indeed, you may fairly say that the violence is not due to the forces, but to their repression. You don't blame the steam for a boiler explosion, but the weights on the safety valve."



"Mr. Mortimer," said Ida solemnly, "you are a weight on the safety valve."

"No, he's not so bad as that. Only a little rust on its hinge," the doctor said.

"Perhaps," suggested Blake, "he's more like the water in the boiler that is not yet heated to boiling point, and is sinking by its own density into closer contact with the furnace?"

"Oh, settle it among yourselves," said Mortimer resignedly. "I shall have a lot to say presently. This theorising is all very well, it sounds very fine as long as you keep to generalities, but I want to hear Mr. Blake hitch on to his scientific basis any justification of the crude and wild practical suggestions of his friends. I don't say that what he says now may not be true. Put as he puts it, it is new to me, I admit, but it sounds eminently reasonable, and I expect that every evolutionist would accept it. But don't you see every evolutionist does not accept Mr. Blake's conclusions from it, at least, if he agrees at all with the ordinary socialists, and is not going to explain that when they propose to rob every man who has a sixpence, and deprive everyone with the least ability of any incentive to exertion, they really mean something quite different. On the contrary, the greatest evolutionists are the strongest opponents of every conceivable socialist development. Science is by no means on his side."

"One step at a time if you don't mind," said Blake. "For the present, I am satisfied if I can be assured

that you are all sufficiently versed in scientific methods of thought to accept my dissolving-view doctrine of society."

"I am quite," said Mortimer, confidently. "We are not such fossils as you seem to suppose. Conservatism to-day isn't afraid of science, whose professors are almost without exception in our ranks and whose seats of learning are our strongholds. We only mistrust wrongheaded misapplications of scientific truths by impatient doctrinaires. I'll admit that every institution in these days must stand or fall on its own merits. It is on the question of their merits we shall quarrel."

"I'll grant also," said Dr. Burton, "that the old order changes, if that's what you want, but don't read into my admissions any belief in the possibility of abrogating the natural laws, of reckoning without the great forces you've mentioned to-day which seem to me certain to shatter your schemes as they always have done in the past."

"That will do very well just now," said Blake, "we'll tackle the law of gravity later and show you how to make water run up a hill."

"I've got an objection," said Ida in her turn. "I haven't any doubt that laws and customs and such things change and will go on changing. But morals, Mr. Blake? You don't mean to say you really think right and wrong alter? That the moral law is a varying, uncertain thing? It's inconceivable."

"Bless you," broke in Mortimer, "that's the basis of the whole thing. You'll find him prepared to put



the Commandments to the vote and accept the decision of the majority as to the definition of every crime forbidden by the Decalogue."

"I'll answer you, Miss Burton," said Blake, "by another question. What do you think of slavery and polygamy?"

"Oh, it's absurd. You know very well."

"Yes, and I know equally well that a few years ago it was universally held right to buy and sell human beings, as long as they were not white-skinned, and that the general view of the domestic relations of Charles II. is very different now from what it was 200 years ago. If you mean by moral law the conception that you have a duty to your neighbour and yourself, I think that is likely to last; but I am sure that even Mr. Mortimer's definitions of right and wrong, just as they differ widely from those of the primitive man, will differ as widely from those which will form the rules of life a hundred or a thousand years hence."

"If you mean that I am not quite a savage," said Mortimer, "I suppose I must take it as a compliment."

"I think it possible that your great-grand-children will hold as savagery many of the ideas now prevalent on murder, adultery, theft and lying," said Blake, "just as we now think old Roman ideas on those subjects almost incomprehensible. And the next time we meet I'll try and show you how these changes come about."

## CHAPTER IV.

"NOW, Mr. Blake," said Ida, when the friends next met, "You succeeded last time in talking us into a frame of mind in which even the most conservative of us is constrained to admit that the institutions, manners, and customs of modern societies are far from being immutable, like the laws of the Medes and Persians. We are all now willing to agree with you that these things are, on the contrary, flexible in response to pressure from within, and are ever modifying with the alteration of a society that has outgrown them. What next, please?"

"I hope the others," said Blake with a glance at Mortimer, "are as apt pupils as you prove yourself, and that we shan't be interrupted with any objections based on the opposite view."

But Mortimer was not to be drawn out of his attitude of armed neutrality. "I'm waiting," he said, "to hear in what direction you propose to improve upon the wisdom of our ancestors."

"We haven't got so far as that," interposed the Doctor. "We have yet to hear what is the tendency of these outside changes to which society must conform."

"Exactly," said Blake, "and if we can establish, on scientific grounds, a clear idea of what that tendency at present is, we shall at least know the general line our practical proposals must take, even if we disagree about their details. But I warn you the enquiry is a



serious one and demands close attention," and drawing a stout manuscript from his breast pocket he began to read as follows:—

"Put in its plainest terms, the conclusion now to be drawn is little flattering to our vanity. It is, that man is more influenced by the way he gets his living than by all other things put together. It affronts our self-esteem to be told that Man goes upon his belly like the serpent. We are disinclined to accept a view so injurious to our pride, that seems to place us on a level with the brute creation. As regards them, we can readily admit the truth of it, and trace modifications in the form and habits of plants and animals to changes in their material environment. We accept the theory that their evolution has taken place in blind obedience to iron circumstances, which made them meet changes in the nature of their climate, their food and their enemies, by corresponding changes in their colours, shapes, organs and habits, or perish. We can go further, and see that primitive men, our poor relations, so many times removed that we need feel no shame in talking about their shabby fortunes, were in these respects as the beasts that perish. They lurked in caves, thankful for the shelter provided by Nature from cold and from ferocious monsters, till the glimmerings of intelligence taught them the uses of clothing, fire, and weapons. The cavemen became hunters; the followers of the chase learnt to tame the beasts and developed into nomadic pastoralists; the wandering owners of flocks and herds learnt agriculture and settled down. Out of the necessities of their lives sprang their relations as members, first of a family, and later, when they began to understand through painful experiences the advantage of co-operation for offence and defence, as members of a tribe. We see how their notions of property, of law, of sexual morality, of civic virtue, were the direct outcome of their modes of life, and could not but be so. It is not so easy to continue the process of reasoning, and to admit that our immediate ancestors and ourselves are in much the same case as were 'our poor relations,' who lived before they could confuse their successors by writing history. But if we can adopt the inhuman attitude of Science, and investigate the facts patiently, and without prepossession, we find that this moulding of Man by his environment

has gone on and is going on. Feudalism was unavoidable in the circumstances of its age, when all else had to be sacrificed to the necessity for external defence, and an agricultural community, with the simplest processes of production to satisfy its own modest wants, submitted to a military domination. We know how what we call civilization—the making of roads, and the quicker communication over the country; the internal peace that made travel and traffic safe; the growth of the town at the expense of the country; the specialization of functions in industry, and the commencement of commerce—how all these things, altering the actual constitution of society, did away with the necessity for the feudal forms, and relegated them to the limbo whither dead things go. Unconscious of the causes of the change, and without their own volition, the barons and law-wards turned into land-owners; the self-supporting peasant-cultivators became, some of them, capitalist farmers, producing for distant markets; the remainder, landless men, selling their labour under the wage system. The townsmen multiplied their crafts and graded off into masters, journeymen and apprentices."

"The changes were incomparably quicker than in the primeval days, before man's brain was awake, but they were slow enough to escape the attention of those who lived amongst them. These did not see as we looking back can see, that men had embarked on a new sort of life altogether. Production was no longer carried on by independent units each for his own use, or for barter with his immediate neighbours, whose needs were fixed and known, but by aggregations of men competing against aggregations of men for success in markets whose fluctuations and wants it required special skill to forecast and suit. As they had been forced to bow to the baron who, in return for their military service and homage, organised and led them so as to secure them peace and food, so now men were forced into subservience to the masters of their trade, who, in return for their industrial discipline, gave employment and wages. As the serfdom, so the wage slavery was the price they had to pay for effective co-operation. As the baron had to enforce unquestioned control over his retainers or be destroyed by a neighbour who exerted stricter discipline, so the embryo capitalist had to grind his human materials into the commercial grooves or be displaced in the



struggle. The basis of modern society was laid, and the inventions of the past hundred years rapidly created the superstructure."

"All this is ancient history already. It is the region of established fact, and there, for the present, we leave our investigation. The point to be born in mind is that the transition from feudalism to the beginning of the stage of social evolution we have now reached, sprang out of altered external circumstances. No thinker destroyed feudalism; no writer 'smiled its chivalry away.' It did not perish before a popular uprising, or give place to a fresh system elaborated on paper by any philosopher in his closet. Its forms, habits and beliefs were inadequate to the new growth, That was all. They had to give way. The revolts against the old order, the new spirit of independence, and the desire for self-development amongst the class that was to supersede the nobles, were not the causes, but the consequences of the change that had taken place deep within the very constitution of the society, and were bound to show themselves on its surface. The men of that time might deplore the dissolution of the old order, and might not be able to understand what it all meant. The changes went on disregarding them, and we can see now that they would have spent their time better in trying to adapt themselves to the new environment. The mail-clad knight must have thought it a horrid, new-fangled notion that the retainer in buff jerkin should be armed with an arquebus. The baron-brigand no doubt condemned the desire of the newly risen traders to traverse the country without being levied upon by him, as most subversive of time-honoured custom. The housewife spinning the material for her family's clothing would have argued that human nature could never alter so as to accept the conditions of the modern factory-hand, and would have seen in that way of life the disruption of the family and the destruction of domestic happiness. Dick Whittington, the 'prentice lad, would have seen in a description of the 'Universal Providers' and 'Stores,' which carry on modern trade, a wilder fairy tale than ever has been told about him. How impossible every belief and hope, every custom and usage, every political form and social institution of our day, would have seemed to men who lived but a few generations ago! Yet the transformation was no miracle. It all sprang from the change in

methods of production caused by changed environment, and in their turn as inevitably causing social changes. The process has not stopped: its pace has only become more rapid, owing to the increased intelligence which makes man a conscious factor in the evolution of society."

When Blake ceased, Mortimer said sententiously.

"I don't say whether I agree with you or not, but what I do say is that one may agree that Crusaders are out of date without being a socialist or anything like one. Why don't you get to your precious schemes for dividing up and starting afresh?"

"Well, you see," said Blake, "I'm coming to them gradually, but what I am now trying to show you is that we haven't got any 'scheme' at all in the sense you mean."

"Come, Tom," said the doctor, "curb your impatience. Mr. Blake has done pretty well for one evening. I can see the general drift of his argument well enough. The economic conditions—the way we get our bread and butter—change, and the social forms change with, or, rather, after them. So his whole point is that the 'schemes' of the socialists are nothing more than recognitions of changes that have already come or are slowly coming into being."

"Thank you, Dr. Burton," said Blake, "I admit that Mr. Mortimer has some reason for his anxiety to get me on to more difficult ground than a criticism of the past which we all have to agree on. But his time will come soon enough."

"Not so fast," went on the doctor, "what I want now to put to you is this: All the changes have been in the direction of freedom—freedom in



religion, freedom in trade, freedom in speech, press and thought. It has been a process of knocking off shackles so as to give free play to the individual. Now you want, it seems, to reverse the process and deprive us of our hardly won liberty of thought and action. For that, you know, is what extension of the sphere of the State means."

"It is my turn to say not so fast now," said Blake; "we have not got so far as that objection of yours yet. I know it is the objection that is mainly responsible for making people who think a little such opponents of socialistic theories. I say 'theories' advisedly, for most such people are in favour of each fragment of socialistic legislation as it is introduced. Before we discuss that point we'll have to come to an understanding as to what liberty is, and as to what amount of 'liberty of thought and action' is enjoyed now by the average man. I can tell you this much at once, however, that, speaking for myself, Socialism attracts me chiefly because I think it shows how freedom for the individual to develop can be obtained."

"That's just another of your paradoxes," said Mortimer. "Everyone here knows that Socialism simply means the smothering of every spark of individual energy."

"That's just another of your prejudices," retorted Blake. "Everyone else here may agree with you, but you'll perhaps allow me to make an exception of the one person present who has made any study of the subject."

Mortimer laughed. "I admit you have me on the hip there," he said, "but you know it is rather annoying to hear you gravely claiming for your opinions the virtue of being on the side of all that one knows them to be opposed to."

"But that's just it, you see," answered Blake. "My point is that you *don't* know, and that the reason you don't know is that you have not learnt. One might as well expect a man to know what you Tories are driving at after listening to the ordinary parson or publican."

"But, Mr. Blake," interposed Ida, "I don't like the beginning of what you said at all. I don't believe that people nowadays are the creatures of circumstances and solely influenced by gross material considerations. And I'm rather disgusted to find the apostle of a new social ideal talking this way. The other night your talk seemed so full of hope. It had never struck me before that the promise of the whole evolutionary theory was that one day the world might be freed from the burden of all the old vices and passions—even from the weight of imperfect notions of right and wrong. But here you are, so it seems to me, tracing all progress to influences that are literally 'beastly.' It is just the horrible mistake that the political economists make when they base their laws on the axiom that all human action originates from the desire to gratify our needs with the least exertion. It isn't true to begin with. 'Man does *not* live by bread alone.' You create a world in which there is no beauty or nobility, no courage nor faith, no room for appeal to the higher instincts. I don't care for your theories. I tell you I know it is true, as all the greatest teachers have shown



us, that men will go cold and hungry in obedience to the need for better things than repletion, warmth and ease. Your doctrine that they are the slaves of mere animal appetites is hateful and degrading. Besides and above all it is simply not *true*. Look at all the self-sacrifice and heroism in the world. Every soldier, every fireman, every lifeboat man, every doctor—before I heard you I should have said, every social reformer—is a living argument against your brutish creed.”

“Well done, Miss Burton,” exclaimed Mortimer, “it couldn’t be put better, but you won’t believe me when I tell you that you are only preaching from the true Tory text ‘*Noblesse oblige*.’”

“I don’t know or care what you call it,” said Ida, flushing with the warmth of her speech, “but I do know that if things are wrong they can only be put right by the conscious effort of individuals, and that you can’t appeal to the individual on low mean grounds and get any good out of it.”

“I hope I haven’t deserved this onslaught,” said Blake, “anyhow I don’t think that in my attempt to convert you three people I have as yet appealed to you on any lower grounds than that of truth and of faith in the eternal power of truth. That I take to be higher than any ideal constructed on a false basis. What misery has been inflicted on the world by the worshipping of false gods enshrined in beautiful temples! How much evil remains unreformed because we won’t admit its existence! All I ask you to do is to look all the facts straight in the face. Disprove my proposition that Man has been more influenced by the

way he gets his living than by all other things put together, and then you’ll affect my argument.”

“I don’t want to deny that proposition, but I contend that it does not include all the facts. You exclude some that are within my own knowledge,” said Ida, looking across at her brother. “I know people who are not influenced by such things, who don’t go about the easiest way to get their living, and whose lives are a proof of the compelling power of motives to which you, by implication, deny importance.”

“But, my dear Miss Burton, you must remember that I expressly stated that so long as Man was an animal, looking neither before nor after, he was entirely the creature of his circumstances, but that, as his brain awakened, he became himself a factor in further change. You will admit that my presence here proves how deeply I feel the truth of that. I want to convert you because I know that, apart from economical changes, the way in which you look at these things hastens or retards the coming of the real revolution. It is my belief that if all the sensible and conscientious people could be got to devote a little time and thought to these subjects, all the evils and dangers and difficulties of the change that is coming would be done away with.”

“And I believe just as firmly,” said Mortimer, “that the changes you hint at would never come about at all if the people who have anything to lose would make up their minds strenuously to resist the beginnings of evil. We drift into these things and find it impossible to go



back. There is quite enough good sense in the country to put a check on revolutionary innovation if its real tendency and logical end were once seen clearly."

"Then we really do agree upon something," said Blake, laughing. "I am all for free discussion, though I was half afraid the other evening that you were not. Let me remind you, however, that there is not one of the changes which have already taken place and which you accept with an easy mind which was not in its early days the subject of the most direful prophecies of woe. You remind me of the Tory reviewer who half a century ago denounced the proposal to run railway trains at a speed of twelve miles an hour, as 'flying in the face of Providence.' In your opinion the country is going to the dogs, as it has been in the opinion of the opponents of change since the earliest times. Does it never strike you as odd that after all, the country never reaches the end of that journey?"

"But you admit yourself," said Burton, "that there are grave dangers ahead?"

"Oh, yes," Blake assented, "grave dangers possibly, and most certainly many difficulties and much disagreeableness. Any sort of change implies that. But our reason is not much use to us if we cannot employ it to avoid the dangers and minimise the difficulties. The first step towards that is to see the facts as they are, and to learn from the past experience of the race."

## CHAPTER V.

AT their next meeting, Blake, without any introduction, at once commenced to read his paper:—

"I have tried briefly to show you the causes that brought about the rise of what we call the capitalist era. Hitherto men had worked either to supply their own simple needs directly, or, by exchange, those of their immediate neighbours. Henceforth all that was changed. The primary end of production was not use, but profit; its object not to supply a want, but to find a market. Now-a-days we are familiarized with that idea, and we see nothing absurd in the fact that no man starts in business with any notion of meeting the wants of society, but simply to make a profit for himself. So far has this view, in reality, temporary and peculiar to a commercial age, become accepted as one of the 'eternal verities,' that when the system reared upon it breaks down, the last thing questioned is its fundamental basis. 'Business is business,' say the sages, as if that settled the matter, quite forgetting that business now is not what it was before the feudal system decayed, and is not what it will be when the capitalist system has passed away. They do seem a little startled, in periods of trade depression, at the paradoxes presented by a society in which collective production on a huge scale is controlled by individuals for their private profit. People starving, apparently because there is a too plentiful supply of food; millions in need of clothes, because warehouses are glutted and mills stopped; people sleeping under hedges, while thousands of houses are empty; all sorts of work requiring to be done, and hundreds of thousands crying out that they can get no work to do—these things become more striking as the forces which produce them grow more powerful. They are ascribed to any and every cause, no matter how ridiculously inadequate, except the true one. That is, that business is openly and notoriously carried on with no desire to get useful work done, or to supply the wants of the community, but is untrammelled by any regard for the public welfare. Capitalism indeed carries to their logical conclusion the principles on



which it is based. Capitalist society admirably fulfils the purpose with which it sets out."

"I have explained how these principles and this purpose inevitably grew out of the altered conditions which destroyed feudalism, and I have yet to explain the principles and purposes which, growing as inevitably out of altered conditions, pronounce the doom of capitalism. Before attempting that, I want to emphasise the truth that customs, laws, and beliefs conform to the real constitution of society, and that this, in its turn, depends upon the economic stage the society has reached."

"In the feudal age, the fighting class was the dominant one, and we have seen that it was so because it was in truth the most important to the community. The characteristics of that class—personal courage, brute strength, large-handed generosity, imperiousness—were the ideal virtues of the age. Usurers and scribes and so forth existed on sufferance. There were settled orders in society, each with definite relations to the other, and it was no virtue to attempt to rise from the class in which you were born. Property, in our sense, was unknown. Personal property, other than weapons of war, or tools of trade, had not come into being. Even the land did not belong to the dominant class. They had an estate in it, but were wardens and governors rather than owners. The social code was the only one possible under the circumstances. No matter what religion said, it was considered commendable to take another man's life, or cattle, or wife, if you did it in fair fight in the recognized way. We have seen that that society broke up from causes beyond its comprehension and outside its control. I will not weary you with a description (which you will readily find elsewhere) of the slow growth of the new capitalist system up to the beginning of the present century. There is still less need to explain how the Long Peace, the introduction of machinery, the application of steam, the growth of foreign trade, the annihilation of space and time by railways and electricity, the development of industry on the largest scale in huge factories, and many other causes were working during the first half of this century to make the commercial class the dominant one. Everyone knows that in the period whose close was marked by the Great Exhibition of 1851, society had been

radically changed. Its leading principle was expressed in the phrase on every lip, that 'the middle class was the backbone of the nation.' The hero of the time was the successful manufacturer, the self-made man, who had entered one of our factory towns with the proverbial half-crown in his pocket, and had accumulated profits by methods that would have been universally despised in the pre-capitalist age. But now the exemplary virtues were enterprise, industry, thrift, acquisitiveness—all the qualities that make individuals succeed in an era of profit-making. Politics were a struggle of the class that had ruled when the community was based on the control of land, against a class that was to rule by its control of capital. Even the religion of the day lost all meaning as a faith to bind society together, and became simply an affair by which a prudent man could, on sound business lines, insure his individual soul against risk in another world. He that gave to the poor lent to the Lord—but expected principal and interest on the maturing of the loan. The most religious even saw no shame in grinding the faces of the poor to extract the profits which they subscribed to send missionaries to the heathen, in the sure and certain hope that the flag followed the missionary, and that trade followed the flag. The mediæval fathers denounced the lending of money at interest, and the mediæval baron would cheerfully roast Isaac of York to extort his usurious gains. We, on the contrary, make our Jewish capitalists peers of the realm."

"But even as feudalism, when at its height, was on the verge of its decay, so when capitalism seemed most flourishing, the causes that were to destroy it were at work. England, with all its practical ability, has never been quick to grasp theories or embrace ideas. The country which, owing to its coal and iron, its command of the sea, and its breed of men, was the first to develop the capitalist system to the full, has been the last of the civilized nations to recognize the new era. It may astonish you to learn that the practical programme of legislative change demanded by Continental socialists contains a great deal that has been already enacted in the interests of the working classes by English Governments—Tory as well as Liberal. When Lord Shaftesbury, then Lord Ashley, was fighting in our House of Commons for factory legislation, he was



called a socialist by his opponents, and with perfect truth, unconscious though he was of any sympathy with Continental Socialism. The Factory Acts were the commencement of a whole series of legislation, of which the tendency is to admit that the dominant class is now to be the working class, and the dominant idea of society, in the immediate future, the Labour idea."

"The causes that have led to this result are sufficiently plain. Capitalism itself massed the labourers in huge towns, and by drilling them in battalions, as it were, gave them a corporate spirit. The middle class broke down the class barriers in its own interest, and set an example to all below them. Universal education and the cheap Press democratized knowledge, which, as we all know, is power. The exactions of the master forced the workmen to combine in trade unions, and through them to conduct a contest which has been nothing less, in its essence, than a warfare between the class which has capital and buys labour, and the class which has no capital and lives by the sale of its labour. The capitalists howled aloud at first, just as the barons and knights must have done in a previous age. But in the struggle now going on, no sane man can doubt which side has had the best of it, and which side must eventually win. In spite of the tremendous difficulties of ignorance and want of organization; in spite of the enormous forces rallied against it, the working class, though defeated apparently in its pitched battles, advances like a flood, of which each separate wave seems to be beaten back, while it still rises slowly and steadily."

"This class struggle will be the final one, because it will be ended by the triumph of a class, which really is not a class at all, since it is not limited and exclusive, like the land-owners or the plutocrats, but includes all men and women. To share in its domination, neither wealth nor privilege are required. It is open to all who are willing to take their share of the world's work. The triumph of Labour is the triumph of Man."

When Blake ceased there was a short silence, broken first by Mortimer, who said with some exultation:

"I am glad we are coming to it at last. Now we begin to see what you're driving at. The sacrifice of every-

thing and everybody to the manual worker, 'the 'orny 'anded working-man.'"

"We'll talk about the sacrifices and so forth later on, if you please," said Blake. "Lots of them will have to be made, no doubt, but you'll find that what I have said is true."

"I disagree altogether with your predictions," said Mortimer, "it's true enough that there's a great deal of talk—foolish and unnecessary talk—about labour, its rights and its wrongs, its grievances and its remedies. But nine-tenths of that is mere political claptrap. It is due clearly enough to the electoral changes which have made the working classes all important at the polls. It doesn't really mean anything, and when they've got their votes and their paid members, and abolished the throne, the Church and the Peers, and all the rest of it, where will they be? Exactly where they are in France and America. Worse off than they are in this conservative country."

"I do not think that you will find many socialists laying any stress upon the effect of political democracy in increasing the power of labour," said Blake. "Some of them may gabble about it, but I assure you that the essence of the socialist creed is that the political machine, however constructed, merely registers decisions in the interest of the class that is really dominant."

"I know that in Australia, for instance," broke in Dr. Burton, "the working class has all the control of the political machine that there is to have, and yet they do not use it to bring about any socialist reformation of society. It's true, of course, that in the



colonies the State undertakes a great many things that it has never attempted in older communities, but that is due entirely to peculiar circumstances, and not to any expressed or conscious desire for Socialism on the part of the workers."

"No," rejoined Blake, "I should think that Australasia is more abjectly under capitalism than the old country. There has been nothing to check its growth, no influence comparable to the feudal traditions of some portions of English society, and that a very powerful one, so far as influence upon thought and custom goes. But let us get back to our point, and illustrate it. We hear that the French are going to hold a great International Exhibition in Paris to inaugurate the twentieth century. Now let me ask you what difference there will be between the common modes of thought amongst those who go to it and the views held by the visitors to the Exhibition of 1851?"

"There can't be any doubt," said Dr. Burton, "that the instance bears out what you say. I believe Mortimer himself will admit that the commercial and middle classes have almost faded out of view, and that all the interest of the future lies in the problems you speak of. It is not the production of wealth, but its distribution that interests us now."

"That's all very well," cried Mortimer, "but I again insist that that has nothing to do with the question. I am quite ready to maintain that the Tories have done more for labour in these last 50 years than the Liberals have, and that they are now more truly interested in the welfare—the real welfare—of the toilers, and ready for any amount of legislation to that end. But that

isn't Socialism. Socialism means dividing up the country into little squares like a chess board, and giving every man an equal share. It means having the State to arrange when you shall work, how you shall work, where you shall live, what you're to think. It means——"

"Don't you really think, Mr. Mortimer," interrupted Ida, "that perhaps you'd better let Mr. Blake explain to us what it means himself? I'm sure you'd do it very nicely, and it must be a relief to your feelings after sitting still so long. But even I know enough about it to understand that it doesn't mean an equal distribution of property, or anything of the kind."

"But it does mean," retorted Mortimer, "interference with the rights of property, and the denial of private property, and that's just the absurdity of it."

"It may ease Mr. Mortimer's mind a little," said Blake smiling, "if I admit at once that it does mean a considerable and speedy interference with the rights of property, as hitherto understood. But after all," he added reflectively, "I don't suppose that the next fifteen years will see such startling developments in that direction as those which he and his friends have become quite accustomed to during the last fifteen."

"Ah, you mean the Irish land legislation," said Dr. Burton.

"Yes; isn't it almost impossible to look back over twenty years and imagine that it was but such a short time ago that everyone thought it was the most natural thing in the world that a landlord should have the right to get as much rent as he could for his land, quite



regardless of the interests of his tenantry or of his country. The British workman will have to go a considerable distance yet before he has equalled the demands of the Irish tenant for the abolition of competition rents. There are signs that he will do so, and if he insists that industry shall secure him 'a living wage,' before anyone else is allowed to profit by it, his demand will be no greater interference with the rights of property than the Irishman's claim for a fair rent."

"But you admit yourself," said Mortimer, triumphantly, "that we Tories insisted that the cotton mills should only be carried on under regulations that secured some leisure and decent sanitary conditions to the workers in them."

"But that, too, was an interference with the rights of property," said Blake, "and if you read the parliamentary reports of the time, you will see that it was denounced as such in no measured terms by the mill-owners."

"But it is no denial of the right of private property," persisted Mortimer, "to say to a man that although his mill is his own he must not carry it on so as to injure the life and the health of his fellow subjects who have to earn their living there. We Tories, at any rate, are quite willing to prevent sheer inhumanity."

"When that can be done without interfering with the landlord interest, perhaps," said Dr. Burton, "but I don't remember that you were very anxious to protect the Irish tenantry when the pressure of rents that kept them on the verge of destitution was complained of. For myself, I think the cases are quite different. If you reduce rents by law you hurt no one but the land-

lord, and he has to pocket his reduced income and make the best of things. He can't take the land away. But if you reduce the profits of capital, it is withdrawn from the industry in question, and instead of getting low wages, the workmen engaged in it will get no wages at all. That's the whole difficulty in the matter. I'm sure we should all be glad enough if every workman in England could earn £5 a week, and would vote for any legislation that would secure that, even if it impoverished the rich. But it simply can't be done."

"We shall have to argue all that out," said Blake, "but what I want you to admit now is not the economic possibility of any large or rapid improvement in the workman's position, but the fact that the working class is in power, is beginning to find it out, and certainly will use its power to better its condition. But in passing I will remind you that the mill-owners said their trade could not be carried on at a profit under the Factory Acts. That they were wrong doesn't prove much, I admit, but it proves, at any rate, that the class whose vested interest is to be attacked is not always to be believed when it says that the country will be ruined along with it."

"I don't think anybody seriously denies your proposition," said Ida. "In fact we are only too much alarmed by the evidence of its truth. It seems likely enough that the future of the country is going to be controlled by the working class, and we are afraid that they're going to ruin the country without benefiting themselves. But I've got a question to ask you. You said that the triumph of Labour was the triumph of Man. Won't my sex have any share in that triumph?"



"It is too late for me to try and answer you this evening, Miss Burton," said Blake, rising to take his leave; "but I think that when the oppressed class comes into its heritage, the oppressed sex will for the first time come by its rights. I am not sure whether I mean by that phrase what you do, but I may tell you that we consider one of the rights of women to be perfect freedom to establish their own economic independence as individuals. I think I shall be able to show you that the changes which are likely to come will give women the opportunity to develop whatever is in them, and give them full freedom to order their own lives and exercise their own faculties. Amongst the working class, you know, a large proportion of the women are wage-earners, and have to be taken into account in any schemes that are to improve the condition of the class as a whole. Certainly when I used the word Man there, I did not mean it to exclude half the race."

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#### CHAPTER VI.

"**N**OW, Miss Burton," said Blake, the next time the four friends assembled, "I wish you'd let me know what is the impression left on your mind by our previous discussion."

"First of all," answered Ida, readily enough, "I have come to the conclusion that Socialism is not to be judged, by those who wish to understand it, from the wild and whirling words of its most ignorant advocates. Secondly, that though it attracts attention from having behind it the vague unrest and incoherent discontent of the suffering masses, it not only formulates a plea for

the amelioration of their lot, but professes to give a scientific explanation of the development of human society. Thirdly, it seems to me that you look upon the future development as being due to the real ascendancy of the working class, and claim that this is already showing itself in changes which are admitted to be in progress, though their real tendency is not generally recognised."

"I don't think I can make any objection to your summary," said Blake; "and now I am going to try and show you why our theories have been opposed and are still opposed by the people who also claim to take scientific views of these things."

"Well, if you can do that," interjected Dr. Burton, "you will do more for your cause than has yet been done, and you'll make converts of the people from whom, in the long run, popular opinions are derived."

"Here goes to try," said Blake, and commenced reading his paper:—

"I have shown how the teachings of religion itself have been influenced by the economic conditions of society, and how its precepts have been modified by the ideas of the ruling class. I want now to show that the teachings of Science have, in the same way, been pressed into the service of those who controlled the thoughts as well as the material destinies of the community."

"Since the publication of the Essay on Population, in which Malthus (himself the father of a very large family) assumed that there was a pressure of population upon subsistence, which must inevitably again create poverty by the mere increase of mouths to be fed, even if war, famine, pestilence, and the other checks on the growth of population were to be removed, his argument has been the bulwark of the propertied class. Darwin, with his dispassionate statement of the struggle for existence, seemed to show that all



progress depends upon the continuance of a free fight, in which the fittest survive to hand on their characteristics to their descendants, and the unfit perish. These two ideas have been greedily seized upon, as showing that, when applied to man, all interference with the assumed laws of nature must be foolish and disastrous. It is true that the anti-socialist theory built up upon them is not, at any rate in these latter days, often stated in all its baldness. It is too ugly for that. Still, it is the belief which inspires most of the opposition to any projects for the increase of the general well-being. Contemplating the awful processes by which evolution has undoubtedly slaughtered millions of individual lives in the animal and vegetable world, in order to perfect a type, men's hearts have been hardened to the spectacle of suffering and death. There seemed no escape from the revolting truth. The price of any sort of progress was effort, and the penalty for inability to make the required effort was annihilation. Applied to social problems, this afforded the very justification which the commercial age needed to preserve its own respect. It taught that success was a proof of fitness and goodness; that failure to succeed—poverty and misery—was the inevitable consequence of the lack of the needed qualities in the individual. Deep in the heart of most men of science at this moment there is a conviction that the poor suffer at the bidding of this natural law, and, 'looking from Nature up to Nature's God,' they adopt the sort of atheism which is the necessary outcome of their hopeless view. They recognize it as hopeless, since the doctrine of the survival of the fittest simply means the survival of those who conform to their conditions, and this is as likely as not, apparently, to produce a type which we cannot help feeling to be bad, ugly and degenerate."

"Now the first part of this theory, whatever might have been the case in the time of Malthus, is demonstrably untrue at the present moment. In the last fifty years, subsistence has increased, not only faster than population has done, but faster than that would have done had all the checks upon its growth, except death from old age, been removed. We know, without any possibility of doubt, that whatever may be the real cause of poverty, in all its shapes, it is not any lack of the material necessities of life. If, for instance, as

is the case, the poor classes in England die twice as fast as the rich classes, it is not because there is not enough food, shelter, clothing, leisure at the command of the population. Any doctor in a poor neighbourhood will show you hundreds of people, it is true, who are dying from the want of these things. But that is not because they are unattainable. They exist in abundance, and any possible demand for them, not only by the present population, but by any numbers that could be brought into being for many generations, could be amply supplied by the means already at the disposal of society. I am not concerned to deny that these enormous powers of production have been called into being by the pressure of hunger. I think that to be the case. But the fact remains that Man now is not in the position of the animal, which can reproduce itself, but has no power to multiply its means of subsistence. He has the power at this moment to increase the means of subsistence much more rapidly than he can increase his numbers."

"Then as to the struggle for existence as regards man. The theory presupposes an equally free access to the means of life, a condition which has not obtained since the beginning of civilization. The individualist, to be logical and to give free play to the forces which he believes will alone produce progress, must abolish the defences of private property. He must disband the army and the police to begin with, and then let the best man win in the struggle. The absurdity of such a proposition requires no comment. Cain was the first logical individualist, when he asked, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' So far as Man is concerned the struggle for existence took quite a different shape when the first simple lesson of the advantage of co-operation was taught. Even amongst the animals you find plenty of instances of co-operation when they have learnt that this enables each of them to make a better defence against a common enemy. It required no radical change in human nature, but only a very slight glimmering of intelligence to show men that each may be better off by combining to win their sustenance from the earth than if they struggled for existence as do the plants. Intelligence in human affairs can do for society what the gardener does for plants. He does not set himself to annul the laws of Nature, but clears the ground of the weeds which would otherwise choke the flowers and



kill them by monopolising all the sustenance in the soil. He effectually puts a stop to the struggle for existence among them, but if the garden is deprived of his care for a few months, it rapidly reverts to its natural state."

"But the doctrine of evolution, which is really so full of the brightest hope for the future of the race, pressed into the service of capitalism, has darkened the minds of the generation which is passing away. For, like everything else, it has been used as a defence of the order that was established."

"The struggle for existence nowadays, need not take place between members of the same community. There is, however, and may be for a long time yet, a similar struggle going on between the different communities and races all over the world. We need not at the moment take this into account. We may rest content if we can be sure that it is not irrevocably decreed by Nature that each man must press his brother under foot in his attempt to get the means of living, but that, on the contrary, Man is already so far the master of things that when the spur to exertion formerly provided by hunger has been replaced by intelligence, the struggle for existence will pass away as the conditions under which it went on certainly have passed."

"Oh, I think I see it now," said Dr. Burton; "but first and foremost I must object that you are running away altogether from the facts as we know them. You must know that the high death-rate of the working class as a whole is very largely due to infant mortality. Do you know what it means in the way of increased population if all the working class babies born in the next hundred years were to live to become in their turn parents of large families, each member of which should also marry early and produce a healthy offspring?"

"Yes, I know that it's a large order, but I still maintain that if they did so we are not within sight of the time in which, even with our present appliances, poverty

of the kind which increases the death-rate would be due to the want of subsistence. Let me ask you, as a doctor, the causes of this death-rate?"

"Oh, that's simple enough," responded the doctor, "it is as you say, the fathers and mothers are overworked and underfed. The babies don't get enough nourishment, enough clothing, enough air, or enough attention. It is poverty that does it."

"But, Fred," said his sister, "you don't mean to say that poverty of that sort, poverty that kills people wholesale, exists round us nowadays?"

"There is no getting away from the facts, Miss Burton," said Blake. "When we talk of poverty and deaths by starvation, we don't refer to the thirty or forty people whom coroners' juries every year declare to have died from destitution and exposure in London alone. If that were all, it would be a small matter. But it is true, that, roughly speaking, the average duration of life amongst the propertied classes is double that of the bulk of the population which earns its living by weekly wages. And the cause is simply that they don't get enough of the necessaries of life."

"If that's true," said Ida, "I don't wonder at the Anarchists!"

"But is it true?" asked Mortimer. "Isn't it, after all, their own fault? The parents of these children you speak of, if they choose, or if they felt their responsibility, would not bring the unfortunate creatures into the world. I don't say the working class has nothing to complain of, but I do say that a man who knows a trade can, as a single man, save money, and if he would



do that and put off marriage until middle life, when he was a foreman or something of that sort, nine-tenths of these horrors need not happen."

"I am afraid that it is not I but you who are the visionary," said Blake quietly, "if you expect only one working man in a hundred to become a father, and even so do you know what it means? Suppose he gets 30/- a week on an average the year round, a high estimate even for a specially skilled and steady worker, taking fluctuations of employment and illness into account. Take a piece of paper and see how far that income will come in providing a couple with five children with the necessaries for healthy life."

"Still," persisted Mortimer, "the matter is in their own hands. If a man can't afford to bring up a family decently, according to his standard of decency, he shouldn't marry till he can. The middle classes practise self-denial in the matter."

"Oh, do they?" said Blake, very drily; "I should have thought you knew another side to that question, which forms by no means the smallest count in the indictment against the propertied class."

"Well, well," said Dr. Burton, "the fact remains that there must be a vast increase of population whether it outruns subsistence or not, so long as the poor marry so early and have such large families."

"Hasn't it ever struck you that there may be other reasons than original sin?" asked Blake, "and that the workman may be cured of his recklessness by means of changes in his condition which would make him more careful without demanding from him the

extraordinary self-restraint that Mr. Mortimer assures us is so marked a characteristic of the young men of the middle class?"

"I don't think I have ever considered the matter in that light," replied Burton.

"I believe it, also, is greatly affected by their economic condition," Blake went on; "the young workman marries very often because he wants a household drudge, and a wife is the cheapest article of the kind in the market, and the only one within his means. He wants children while he is still a young man, that they may be able to earn something towards the family support when he himself is earning less. As a matter of fact, the workman rears his family at the time when he is earning the largest income. That income has already begun to diminish at the age when Mr. Mortimer's ascetic friends begin to think of marrying and settling down. Every day after he is thirty he finds himself more and more likely to be passed over for employment in favour of a younger man."

"You don't mean to say," said Ida, "that they begin to be worked out at thirty?"

"Any workman will tell you the same. It is a suggestive fact in this connection, that men of middle age seeking employment dye their hair to prevent its greyness betraying their years."

"Then you mean to say that workmen marry young because they must?" asked Mortimer. "Of course there's no compulsion on any individual in the class to do so, I understand that. But you mean that as a class their circumstances impel them to it?"



"Precisely," replied Blake, "and in the same way you'll find a natural and sufficient reason for some other working class peculiarities that you can't understand. You ask them to save, for instance, for getting what their actual circumstances are. Suppose your workman on 30/- a week saves 5/- of it. Remember that he is often thrown out of work and tempted to diminish his hoard, but if he kept it up steadily for ten years he would have £130, and if he were lucky enough to escape all the pitfalls that are spread for the poor and inexperienced investor, he might then increase his income by 2/- a week. Think of it!"

"I never thought of it in that way," admitted Mortimer, rather crestfallen.

"No, it's easier to say 'the poor in a lump is bad,' than to see that a virtue which is easy to the middle class because to them it brings its own reward, is a very different matter to the poor. I can hardly keep patience with those who have so little understanding or imagination. You remind me of a friend of mine who was a cab-washer at 15/- a week, one of the few unmarried adult labourers I have known. He went once to a meeting at Grosvenor House, where all sorts of big-wigs were advocating thrift as the salvation of the working classes. He got up in the middle of the proceedings and said he had never saved any money, and didn't see how he could, though he thought he was as thrifty as anyone present. He went on to add that if the Duke of Westminster would change incomes with him for a year he would undertake to save more than His Grace had ever done, and to bet the whole of his

savings that the Duke would not have been able to make the 15/- a week go as far as he did."

"That was a fair enough retort, I dare say," said Mortimer laughing, "but you know very well that they can save, and rise to better positions if they like—start in business and so forth."

"I don't deny that it is possible to the exceptionally gifted man," said Blake, "just as it's possible for any barrister to become Lord Chancellor, but you'll agree that every barrister can't rise to the Woolsack, and that all the working class can't set up in business and become employers of labour, because, don't you see, there would then be no labour to employ."

"Come, Mr. Mortimer," said Ida, "I think you'd better let me have a turn at asking questions now. I think your working men, if they're down-trodden slaves themselves, make worse slaves still of their wives, and I was glad to hear Mr. Blake admit it. But don't you think that it's owing—the degradation of the home life—more to drink than anything else?"

"You'll think I'm a man of one idea, I suppose," said Blake, "but their drinking habits spring out of their economic conditions also, I believe. I'll have more to say about that later."

"I've got a great deal to say," put in the doctor, "but do you know I think I'll try and write down my objections to what you've said to-day, and get you to talk it over next time."

This was agreed to, and the party broke up. As Blake was leaving, Mortimer said to him, "I don't want you to think that we Tories don't sympathise with



the poor in their difficulties in these matters. I for one am most anxious to help them to help themselves. For instance, about the saving, I am all in favour of increasing the facilities given by the Savings Banks, of protecting the poor from fraud practised upon them by swindling building, friendly, and insurance societies, and of establishing a scheme of old age pensions."

"I'm glad to hear it," returned Blake, "for it proves what I had suspected, that you are more of a socialist than you thought. You ask any individualist what is the meaning of measures of that kind!"

"I don't call that sort of thing Socialism," said Mortimer; "it's quite in accordance with Tory traditions. It won't sap independence or damage property."

"I understand," said Blake, "the State interference you approve of is good, and therefore it can't be Socialism."

"And about the drink, too," said Mortimer, without heeding the thrust, "I hope you're not one of the intemperate Temperance people? For my part, I would like to see the Gothenburg system tried here."

"But that's Socialism in its worst form," retorted Blake, laughing, "and utterly destructive of the rights of private property, too. Ask the publicans if it isn't!"

## CHAPTER VII.

AT the ensuing meeting Dr. Burton took Blake's place, and commenced to read from a paper in which he had noted down his objections to the views which the latter had expressed at the last discussion. Before doing so, he begged his hearers to understand that what he was about to say was not put forward for the purpose of argument, but embodied opinions which he sincerely held, and would be glad to abandon if he could see good reasons for doing so. Then he began:—

"It seems to me that Mr. Blake has not made good the latter part of his contention. I am willing to concede to him that the recent developments of science have put mankind beyond the reach of immediate want. But it is plain that the inventions and enterprise which have led to this result have come from individual effort, prompted by the desire of gain. I am conscious that this does not sound a very noble or inspiring theory, and it would be easy and pleasant to enlarge on the many instances which could be brought forward to prove that men of very various abilities have been known to exercise these to their fullest extent under the pressure of finer motives, such as the desire to do good work for its own sake, the love of truth, or zeal for the public welfare. But it is quite unworthy to argue from these special and comparatively rare cases, that mankind on the whole is actuated and comparatively rare cases, than the fear of hunger and the desire of acquiring, not their share, but the largest possible portion of the good things of this world. The bulk of the population who do the drudgery of the world do it only under compulsion. Man is a lazy animal, and he will not work at all unless obliged to do so by an ever-present terror of the penalties for not working. Now Socialism, if it means anything at all, signifies the abolition of those penalties. I see nothing which it offers to put in their place to act as an incentive to exertion."



"I will take as an instance to prove my meaning the direct effect of some of the changes it aims at. It would, at any rate, have more of the work of the world done by Government servants instead of by private firms. You talk of the State doing this and the other, but the phrase means merely that certain work shall be supervised by Government officials without anyone in particular to look after them, instead of by the employees of individual capitalists, who, truly enough, make them work hard but make them work well. My first contention is that the work will be done badly, and it is proved by the undoubted fact that a private firm will always beat a Government department in efficiency and economy. The reason is simply that in the one case the fear of hunger and the greed for gain operate with tremendous force upon all concerned. In the other they are absent. Anyone who knows the methods of bureaucracy will admit the truth of what I say. While the functions of Government are confined to matters that don't concern us much, this only means that we pay a great deal in taxes, and have very little to show for it. But if Mr. Blake puts the industry of the nation into the hands of the Circumlocution Office there will very soon be no wealth left for anybody. Your mill-hands may be badly off; they may, for all I know, only get a third of the wealth they produce. But if you put the cotton trade into the hands of the gentlemen who are kind enough to condescend to look after the Army and Navy in the intervals they can spare from reading the *Times* between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., there will be such mismanagement that your operatives, even if they get the whole produce of their labour, will soon be worse off than they are now, unless the taxpayer is called upon to make up the difference."

"In a word, I say that the capitalist, no matter how great the tribute he extorts from Society, is cheap at the price, much cheaper, in the long run, than State organisation of industry."

"Then, further, think of the effect upon character. Anyone who knows the poor knows that what keeps them down is their lack of resource, of enterprise, of the faculty of compelling circumstances, of what we mean by the term 'backbone.' We may be sorry for those who haven't got it. I think Mr. Blake, like most of those who share his opinions, underrates the amount of kindly feeling

which the English rich have for the English poor, and fails to understand that it is not want of sympathy or a desire to retain their own superfluity of wealth that makes them dread the effect of legislative changes which would teach the poor man to rely upon others instead of himself. That and nothing else is the tendency of all such changes. It is a hard system which not only tells men they must work or starve, but inflicts the penalty upon them, no matter how willing they are to work, unless they can find productive channels for their industry. But that system after all does supply the wants of society, even if it entails great suffering. If you abandon the current doctrine and tell people that instead of struggling themselves they are to rely on the State to struggle for them, you will in a generation have destroyed self-reliance, energy and enterprise. The last state of society will be worse than the first."

"Nor does Mr. Blake's explanation of Socialism as merely a natural development of co-operation hold water. With voluntary co-operation we are all agreed. That springs from increased intelligence, and the more we have of it the better. But the compulsory co-operation of Socialism, since it is not the result of a change in the inward man, but an artificial growth, forced upon him by an external power, must break down. In the very simplest matters we see that voluntary co-operation is successful, but the conditions of its success are a strong common interest and unusual intelligence on the part of the co-operators. Even so it breaks down before very slight difficulties. Productive co-operation has almost entirely failed wherever it has been tried. That there is hope of the growth of co-operative sentiment and ability I do not deny, but all the hope of that lies in an increase of the faculties which render it possible. Those faculties are still very uncommon, and to make of the State a huge co-operative society in which not one per cent. of the members is actuated by co-operative principles, is to court disaster. You seem to me to remove the present incentives to exertion and to supply in their place only a vague hope that the mechanism of society will continue in activity when the mainspring is removed."

"That Socialism of a sort is possible under an autocracy no one will deny. But Mr. Blake himself says that the creature comfort



that might be gained for the populace under a benevolent despotism would be dearly bought by the destruction of all powers of self-government, self-control and enterprise on the part of the citizens. If you put me in charge of a large cotton plantation and give me powers of life and death over the negroes, I can no doubt produce for you a well-fed, clean and healthy population, but the one thing that I certainly could not produce would be a community capable of self-government, and we know as a matter of fact that, granted that creature-comfort obtained on some of the slave plantations, on many others the corrupting influences of despotism degraded ruler as well as ruled, as we believe has always been the case in the long run in autocratic states."

"In the oriental myth the earth is supposed to rest on the back of an elephant, which again stands on the back of a tortoise, but what the tortoise stands on, no one knows. So it seems to me in your scheme everything rests on the State, the State rests on the character of its individual citizens, and I want to know whence that character is to be derived without the struggle and suffering, the effort and aspiration which go to make energy, enterprise, self-reliance and grit. Will you accuse me of 'dropping into poetry' if I quote what always seems to me the noblest expression of the individualist sentiment, which, when stated by the economists seems to you socialists so meanly cruel?"

"Then, welcome each rebuff  
That turns earth's smoothness rough,  
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!  
Be our joys three-parts pain!  
Strive, and hold cheap the strain:  
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!"

"For thence—a paradox  
Which comforts while it mocks—  
Shall life succeed in that it seems to fail:  
What I aspired to be,  
And was not, comforts me:

A brute I might have been, but would not sink i' the scale."

"Shall circumstance tamely be allowed to mould character, or shall character nobly conquer circumstance? It will make some

difference to the future of mankind which doctrine becomes the key-note of the modern democratic movement. For the product of all these things is men, and one man may be worth an empire. Let me give an instance outside the range of the commercial success which irritates what I shall venture to call Mr. Blake's prejudices. We English are at this moment in possession of India, because one man was self-reliant for one hour. You know that before the battle of Plassey, Clive held a council of war, and all his colleagues unanimously declared against the folly of giving battle to the enormously superior forces of the enemy. It was decided to retire, but Clive went out into the night, and sitting alone under a grove of palm-trees outside the camp, made up his mind to risk the encounter. That resolve won us India. Any system of society that saps and destroys indomitable resolution will cause Man to 'sink i' the scale.' Mr. Blake will not convert me nor many thousands of others, unless he can show some hope that his system of governmental coddling is going to leave unimpaired the springs of individual greatness."

"Well done, indeed, Burton," cried Mortimer, "I didn't believe that any Radical could talk like that. You've given our friend a harder nut than he can crack."

"I don't know about that," said Blake, "but I freely admit that Dr. Burton has put very strongly the strongest part of the case against Socialism. I am disposed to agree with him as to the danger he points out, and what I have to say in opposition will not be so much to deny the evils that may come as to point out the greater evils which now exist. To begin with, he assumes that in our present society all the incentives to exertion and all the penalties against laziness combine to impel men to useful work. That I flatly deny. There are at this moment hundreds of thousands of people in this country who are denied access to the means of satisfying their desires. The operation of



Individualism in the control of industry results (inevitably, as I shall explain later) in throwing large numbers out of employment. That fact is patent and undeniable. The savage had the option of working or starving. These modern men have to choose between starvation and begging or crime. I concede that the spur of hunger drives them to seek avenues for employment, and that a small percentage may find ways of earning their living which would otherwise remain undiscovered. But it is certain that for the bulk of them the task is not a difficult one which incites to activity, but an impossible one that drives to despair. To them, therefore, the incentive is not to industry, but to crime or mendicancy. The pressure makes one company-promoter, perhaps, but it certainly makes a dozen thieves, prostitutes and paupers. Further there is the condition of the children in their families to be taken account of. The poverty which you suppose breeds self-reliance in the adults most surely deprives children of the physical frame in which alone individualist virtues can flourish. Don't mistake me. I am not fool enough to deny that courage and resolution are to be found in the under-fed, stunted, sickly and diseased. But, taking the average of a large number, those virtues will be rarer amongst ten thousand children who spend their earlier years in the home of parents in ill-paid and fluctuating employment than amongst ten thousand who have had the advantages of physical nourishment and decent training. That is the side of the shield you don't see."

"You mean," interposed Ida, "that, taking men as they are, stress and strain which develop exceptionally

strong characters, crush the majority that are too weak to bear them. But is not that just the inexorable process of Nature everywhere?"

"I should have no objection to it, but that the conditions of the struggle are at present regulated by human institutions. If you're going to have a contest let the conditions be fair. But in this struggle the proper-tied classes have got all the weapons. It is true that these can be wrested from them by force, and this seems to be what we're drifting to. Yet it does not seem the best way for civilized beings capable of using at any rate some sort of reasoning power."

"Yes," said Ida, "It is a different matter when the problem deals with reasonable beings who have some control over their conditions."

"To continue," said Blake, "I insist that the present system puts a premium on anything rather than useful work. A man who makes money may incidentally benefit his kind, but this is pure accident. Honesty may be the best policy, but it isn't the most paying one. If acquisitiveness and greed for gain form the basis of society as it stands, they have much to answer for. Which pays best, to make toilsome scientific research, or to puff pills; to sell a sound article or an adulterated one; to build a healthy home or a jerry-built abomination? The incentive, I contend, is wholly to bad and swindling work—work that pays—and hence many of our present evils. To me it is a matter of astonishment that human nature should not have succumbed altogether to the inducement to villainy held out by existing arrangements."



"Give all due weight to that," said Dr. Burton, "but even bad work, and cunning if you like, are better than somnolent ease and lethargy."

"But now you are assuming," continued Blake, "that in the new order laziness would go unpunished by the natural penalty—which is true—and that it would be unpunished by society—which is absurd. In the co-operative commonwealth every man would lose by his neighbour's idleness, for he would have to work more himself or go short of something. It is not assuming an extraordinarily high rate of intelligence to assert that this would be universally recognized, and that shirking on the part of the individual would be quickly detected—since every one would be on the look out for it—and heavily punished—because every one would lose by it."

"That sounds very plausible," said Mortimer; "but how does it work out in practice with State officials at present?"

"In the transition stage," said Blake, "the Government official is relieved from the effects of competition, and at the same time he is not subjected to criticism. In the naval and military departments, for instance, things are managed badly and expensively, I don't doubt, but then they are almost entirely exempt from public criticism. It doesn't matter, or we think it doesn't matter, to us if they shirk or mismanage their work. But let another Crimean War come and you'd see that every one of us would take such an interest in the departmental doings as would soon put a stop to jobbery, favouritism and waste. At present the State departments are a good deal like a workshop when the master

is away. In the matters that do interest us we take good care that the State does its duty. We're interested in receiving our letters, for instance, and if one is lost or delayed we make a fuss about it. Consequently the Post Office, though it might be better, is ever so much more business-like than the departments which don't affect us individually."

"There is a great deal in what you say," said Dr. Burton, thoughtfully. "I see that as the State extends its functions to interfere with the lives of private citizens these are likely to take more interest in public affairs, and to insist that officialdom shall look after their interests."

"Exactly," said Blake; "the Government of the future will be more like the Board of Directors of a shareholders' company, or the committee of a club, than the bureaucracy of Jacks-in-office, who now treat any one of the public as a master treats his servant instead of *vice versa*. Now as to the effect on character. I grant that that is all important. But I ask you to consider as against your instance of Clive, the thousands who have never had a chance of self-development since the hour of their birth—nay, for that matter, if we take ante-natal influences into account, were born so that resolution and energy were as little to be expected from than as physical strength and stamina. Clive himself when he fell a victim to opium, was a despairing suicide. Thousands to-day are drugged and depraved by want of food and air, of education, rest and wholesome pleasures. Effort and struggle there will be in the future, no doubt, but I do not see that their results will be less advantageous when the



means of a healthy physical existence are assured to all. I might try the *reductio ad absurdum* argument on you. With your doctoring you preserve, let us assume, the lives of the sickly. You preach sanitary laws which reduce the pressure of the struggle for existence and keep people alive who would otherwise succumb. As you accuse me of reducing the moral, so might I convict you of reducing the physical stamina of the race. Would the general health be improved if you threw your physic to the dogs and let the microbes kill off all but the most robust, in the hope that in the long run the race, if decimated, would consist of individuals who were cholera and small-pox proof? Yet the cases are really analogous. You don't trust to Nature to cure us under the artificial circumstances of civilized life. The process would be too expensive. So I maintain that if my remedies are not needed by the persons of extraordinary vigour, energy and resource, they are called for by that great mass of men and women who have so long suffered unnoticed and in silence, but are just beginning to understand that they have the power to insist that this world shall be ordered not in the interest of the few exceptions, but in that of the average mass of mankind."

## CHAPTER VIII.

"I REALLY do hope," said Mortimer, who had been visibly chafing during the later discussions, "that you're going to take us out of the region of theorising this evening. It all sounds so pretty up till now that I am quite longing to bring you down to the practical difficulties."

"There is a little more ground to clear first," answered Blake, "but we are not far off the Promised Land. I am going now to try and enlist your sympathies by showing how little the labour movement has in common with your political enemies."

"I shall be glad of that in a different way," Ida remarked, "for I've never been able to see how anybody who called himself a reformer can help seeing that the Liberal party, in England, at any rate, is truly 'the great engine of progress.'"

"That bothers me, too," said Dr. Burton, "for I don't feel ashamed of calling myself a member of the Liberal party, and the way some of your socialist friends denounce it as if it were not the instrument of every project for emancipating the oppressed is a perfect mystery to me."

"Oh, yes," said Mortimer with a laugh, "that extraordinary cant is a never failing source of amusement to us Tories. You declare that your motto is, 'Trust the people,' and you never can understand why the people don't return the compliment. You take it as a personal insult when you are reminded that in



spite of your offers of every kind of electoral bribe a good half of the working classes in England, at any rate, want none of your Radicalism."

"Speaking for myself," retorted the doctor, "I can understand well enough that a half of the least educated class may think Toryism better. But I presume Mr. Blake will give us his view."

Thus called upon, Blake commenced:—

"It is my present purpose to ascertain what is the true drift and tendency of the working class movement. All sorts of people profess to speak in its name. Every kind of panacea is advocated as the one thing wanted by the toiling millions. Like the three tailors of Tooley street, who are accused of having drawn up a manifesto, commencing 'We, the people of England,' everyone who has a fad or an economic heresy tacks the name of labour to his nostrum. You may say that I am in the same case myself, that Socialism has no authentic right to speak on behalf of our manual toilers, whatever may be the case on the Continent. Let us see, then, if we can find and formulate the demands of the labourer as a labourer."

"There is one movement, and only one, which is distinctly working class, which has sprung spontaneously, without any preaching from above or any worked-up agitation, from the needs and the necessities of the labourer himself. This is the trade union movement. Workmen form these combinations without any theory consciously expressed, though in the rules of the oldest and wealthiest unions, their purposes are defined in language to which any socialist will gladly subscribe."

"Let us consider the position of the workman during this age of which we have been speaking, in which private property was established and industry has been carried on for the object of making profit under the wage-system. If a man has no property to live on he must live upon the sale of his labour. There is no common land or capital to which he can apply his labour so as to

produce the necessaries of life. When the wage-earner—a member of the proletariat, as the socialist catch-phrase goes—comes into the world, he is possessed of nothing—unless you count his share of the National Debt. He finds the means of making wealth already appropriated by people who, as we have seen, won't allow those means to be used unless they can make a profit by doing so. The would-be wage-earner, therefore, has to go and make a bargain with an employer. The latter can afford to wait, while the worker has to earn a meal before he can get one. It is not difficult to see which side gets the best of the bargain. Competition for employment sets in. Two hungry men are after the same job, and the employer, who, like any other buyer, wants to give the smallest price he can, takes the man who, other things being equal, will accept the lowest wage. This competition for employment is increased by every subdivision of labour, every aggregation of capital, every invention—in fact, by every bit of progress that enables the same amount of work to be done with less labour. That, of course, should be a general benefit, for it would seem to lighten the curse of Adam, and to allow everyone to get his bread with less sweat of his brow than previously. But the direct effect of each such change under the wage system is to dismiss hands formerly employed, to send them to swell the number of applicants for work elsewhere, and thus to intensify the cut-throat competition. Sentimental reformers are apt to rail against the law of supply and demand, but they might just as well denounce the procession of the equinoxes. That law brings it about that when two men are applying for one vacancy in a factory, the employer can make his own terms. It equally insists that two employers have vacancies and there is only one man available, he can make *his* own terms. There are limits on both sides to this process. The workman cannot in the long run afford to take less than will keep him in what, allowing for all the variations of climate, race, and civilization, he considers the absolute necessities of life. The employer cannot in the long run pay the workman twenty shillings for labour which brings in 19s. 11d. Between these two points the rate of wages is fixed by the haggling of the market, and depends entirely upon the amount of competition for employment—on the supply of labour and the demand for it."



"These sound like commonplaces ; nobody denies their truth. But the workman alone has seen their real significance, which has been pressed in upon him, without any theorising, by the circumstances of his daily life. He did not learn from Adam Smith that the natural wages of labour is the full produce of labour, but he knows that he never gets as much as he wants. When he asks himself why he gets no more, he does not proceed to discuss the origins of society. He knows that if he is refused a rise of two shillings a week, it is because the employer is well aware that Bill Smith round the corner, who is out of work, would be only too glad to take on the job at the present rate. He does not ask whether the employer can afford to pay. He knows perfectly well that the employer is in business to make money and does it. He knows with the certainty of conviction impressed on him by daily illustration, that his rate of wages varies with the presence or absence of competitors in the labour market. Impelled by this conviction, he sets himself to restrict that competition in all ways."

"A great many people will tell you that trade unions are associations for mutual improvement, insurance against death, sickness, or scarcity of employment, and so forth. It is true that such objects are included, in various shapes, in the purposes of the combinations ; but the essence of a trade union is that it is a combination amongst wage earners to forward their interests as against those of their employer. Many people will tell you that the interests of employer and employed are identical, meaning, I suppose, that both suffer in a decaying trade, and both are better off in a flourishing one. But the workman knows better. He understands that it is the employers' interest (no matter how good or kindly he may be as a man), as an employer to get labour, just like the other commodities he requires, as cheaply as possible. On the other hand, it is the interest of the workman, like the seller of any other commodity, to get as much for his labour as he can. The interests, therefore, are not identical, but diametrically opposed. The workman fully understands this, and the trade union is his way of expressing it. Further, he understands though he may not be able to give a very coherent expression to his

reasons, that the great lever which enables the buyer of labour to lower its price is the excess of its supply—in other words, the competition of the unemployed."

"Hence the ruling principle of trade unions is to restrict competition. This is recognizable in their constant efforts to substitute for free competition as the means of fixing wages, hours, and conditions of work, agreement between masters and men, or, failing that, agreement amongst all the men qualified for the trade to stand out for a certain minimum, or, failing that again, the enforcement by the State of regulations which will attain the object they desire. This explains things that surprise the individualists. Every union tries to insist on apprenticeship before a youth is qualified to earn journeyman's wages. The object is not to maintain a high standard of work, but to prevent their labour market being flooded. The same reason accounts for their efforts to restrict apprentices to a fixed proportion of the adults employed. The hostility to labour-saving machinery is in the same way due to its effects in creating a sudden and artificial overcrowding of the labour market. The atrocities committed on non-unionists and the hatred of them implied in the nick-names 'blacklegs,' 'knobsticks,' 'scabs,' and so forth, are due to the conviction that these men in getting employment at lower wages not only oust the unionist who stands out for higher rates, but also that their competition bring down the rate all round. I am not seeking to excuse the violence of strikers, but to show its cause. Their feeling to non-unionists is murderous, because they look upon them as murderers, who unfairly deprive them of their livelihood."

'You take my life

When you do take the means by which I live.'

"expresses the attitude of the striker to the blackleg, and accounts for his behaviour to him."

"We have seen that the principle which distinguished the commercial age from the feudal was that of freedom for the individual in his ownership and control of property, in his right to force his way out of the class into which he was born, and to get wealth the best way he could. That principle found its expression in the political enfranchisement of the middle class and in the



application to industry of *laissez-faire*, freedom of contract and freedom of trade. With the domination of the working class the principles that become ascendant absolutely deny this right of competition as inimical to the interests of labour, and will inevitably impose restrictions upon trade and industry, that is, will incorporate in the laws and institutions of society the leading ideas upon which trade unionism is based."

"Why, confound it all!" cried Mortimer, "instead of being as I thought from what you said the first day you came, honest enough to object to these idiotic strikes, and plucky enough to tell the men that they are ruining themselves and the country by driving away trade, you're the worst trade unionist of the lot!"

"Why, certainly," assented Blake, "if I wasn't a modest man, I would claim to be the strongest trade unionist in existence."

"But you know you said, Mr. Blake, that you did advise those men in Lancashire not to go on strike, and got into hot water for doing it," exclaimed Ida. "I thought that was so nice of you."

"And it seems," added Dr. Burton, "that you were right too. For I see by the papers that the unions are smashed up and that all the funds are gone. The men are slowly coming back to work, and the suffering in the district is frightful."

"A strike is only a battle," said Blake, "and I don't think that generalship consists in fighting whenever the chance is offered, whether time and place suit the enemy or not. Success is the only excuse for fighting. I think that a general who loses an engagement should be shot, or at any rate drummed out of the army. It's his business to win, not to lose battles, and he is re-

sponsible for every life lost by falling into ambushes or being drawn into situations in which the enemy can divide his forces, and destroy them in detail. It's just the same with strikes."

"But aren't there some defeats that are better than victories?" Ida asked, "You don't agree with Clough, 'tis better to have fought and lost than never to have fought at all?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Burton," replied Blake promptly, "it is very often necessary to lose an engagement, and sacrifice an army corps, if there is any hope that the defeat may pave the way for victory. But the generalship I prefer is that which inflicts greatest loss on the enemy at the least cost of blood and money to my side. If I had my way there would be quite enough pitched battles to satisfy you. But every one of them would be fought on my ground and not on that chosen by the enemy. I'd have not only Providence and the big battalions, but the strategical advantage on my side."

"Then I hope you will never have your way," said Mortimer, "you are a more dangerous fellow than I thought!"

"That may be. In any case it's not the occurrence, but the failure of strikes that distresses me. At all events, you'll admit that the desire of the workman is to make his interest the first consideration in industry, to bring about a state of affairs in which production will be carried on so as to pay high wages instead of, as now, to pay high profits."

"Not a doubt of it," said Mortimer. "Only the thing can't be done."



"That's what the Liberal capitalists said to your Ten Hours' Bill, and what the employers in the engineering trade said to the nine hours' movement, and what the London Dock directors said to the agitation for sixpence an hour. Your bare assertion is interesting as a statement of the position of modern Toryism, but it's hardly convincing as an argument."

"If it's argument you want," said Mortimer, "here you are. I go into business, as you say to make money, or at any rate with the intention of keeping out of the Bankruptcy Court. I can't get more than a certain price for my productions. If I pay more than a certain amount in wages, I lose money. All the strikes in the world can't prevent that, but they can force me to close my works, throw my hands out of employment, and simply increase the competition you speak of."

"That has the merit of being a simple explanation," rejoined Blake, "perhaps too simple. How does it square with the facts that the improvements in the conditions of labour I have just mentioned, though declared to be 'impossible,' have nevertheless taken place?"

"Well, I suppose," said Mortimer, "they weren't impossible, but I'm hanged if I know why."

"Yet it's customary, I believe," Blake went on, "if facts don't square with one's theory, to suspect one's theory rather than the facts. Or are you like that pillar of commercialism, Mr. Podsnap, who cleared the world of its most difficult problems by sweeping them behind him with a flourish of his arm and the words 'I don't want to know about it, I don't choose to discuss it. I don't admit it.' Is that Tory Democracy

and its claim on the suffrages of an enlightened electorate?"

"Oh come," said Mortimer, "I'm not so bad as that. What I mean is that one doesn't know the ins and outs of those things, and I'm willing to learn."

"It looks," said Dr. Burton, "that at any rate in those cases the men were right, and that the employers could, and did, find ways of remaining solvent under the altered conditions."

"When the men were strong enough to insist on the establishment of a limited working day or a higher wage, the employers conformed to this new factor in their environment," said Blake. "It made the struggle for existence less keen amongst the men and more keen between the masters. Mr. Mortimer assumes that the rate of wages is the only factor in the cost of production which can be reduced. The others—profits, obsolete methods, mismanagement, interest on capital and the rest, are too sacred to be touched. If a trade doesn't pay, reduce wages. If it still doesn't pay, reduce them again. It's a pretty formula, but you can't be surprised if the people who live on wages don't accept it gladly."

"But what is the working class formula to replace it?" asked Ida.

"Mr. Mortimer reminds me of the economical doctrine of a philanthropical gentleman I once met who assured me it was his dearest wish to share his profits with his work people, only that he had no profits to share. I found out afterwards that this worthy had no capital of his own, and had bought on credit from its former proprietor a big business, borrowing the ready money with which to carry it on. He had been



drawing a large income for ten years, was paying 10 per cent. on the purchase money as interest, and large instalments of the principal every year. Yet, according to his reckoning, there were no profits!"

"Yes, but the remedy, Mr. Blake?" persisted Ida.

"If the capitalist formula is that 5 per cent. is the divine law," said Blake, "the labour formula is that the first claim upon the product of industry is that of the workers for the essentials of healthy and decent existence. Like Mr. Mortimer, I will put a concrete case, and suppose that I go into business. At present if, owing to my want of capital or of capacity, I can't make a profit while paying trade union rates of wages, I simply knock so much off the wage bill, and hey, presto! the deficiency becomes a surplus. In other words, I use my control of property, with the aid of the competition of the unemployed workmen, to squeeze out of the hire of my labourers sufficient to make up for my bad machinery, poor credit or imbecile management. Trade unionist principles, if enforced, would not allow that pressure to be applied."

"Very well," said Mortimer, triumphantly, "then you would go bankrupt, and your men would get no wages at all."

"Yes, I should go bankrupt, but that would make no difference in the demand for the products of my trade. My hands would get employment under another master who could make both ends meet while paying the trade union rate, simply because he had better appliances and the wits to use them properly."

"I've got a lot to say," said Dr. Burton, "but I will reserve it for our next meeting."

## CHAPTER IX.

"I KNOW," said Blake, when they met again, "that Dr. Burton yearns to attack the trade union principles I sketched last time. But I have something more to say first." Then he began to read:—

"I contend that in the coming era the working class will be supreme owing to changes in the constitution of society, and that it will govern on the principle of trade unionism. These, I now want to show, are not opposed to economic law, but, on the contrary, in accordance with it."

"At the outset I must, of course, admit, as you will expect from my previous utterances, that very often the actions and methods of trades unions have been weak, foolish, and mistaken. Nothing better could have been expected. It is useless to argue that the principles are false because, in applying them, men have at times misunderstood the circumstances, and so ruined themselves as well as their masters by striking against a reduction of wages made absolutely necessary, for instance, by foreign competition or industrial crisis. Nor do their failures prove anything. Old methods may be inadequate under new or altered conditions. It was quite easy to make a 'corner' in labour and to keep up its price in days when labour could not be readily transported from place to place. Tactics that sufficed then must fail now. But these are matters of detail. The essential factor in the situation is that the supply of labour is constantly being increased by improvements in production that reduce the demand for it by an employing class which has appropriated all the means of subsistence. The real question, then, is which of the two following principles is sound—That the wages of labour should be settled by the free action of the law of supply and demand; or by some regulation to fix wages by agreement."

"Let us first see what is the necessary result of free competition. Granted that it acts as a spur to activity, and that to it is due the feverish and ceaseless industry that characterises the commercial



age, do these benefits in any way compensate for the evils now universally admitted and deplored? We glory in the amazing cheapness of production that follows, and we wring our hands over the destitution of the mass of the population which also results from it. It is good, no doubt, to be able to buy a dozen boxes of matches for a few farthings, and a slop suit for a few shillings; but you cannot have these things without having women working all day and half the night for a penny an hour and men at twopence an hour. A bad case comes up in the paper and we beat our breasts, forgetting that the instance is only one a little worse than the general average, and that tens of thousands of the population are living under similar conditions. Now, the curious thing is that in almost every trade where such horrors prevail, you will find an employer here and there who manages to pay a considerably higher rate than the worst employer, and yet makes a profit. The facts are little noticed, but they are quite astounding. In one large trade union in London, for example, a standard rate of wage is maintained which is nearly twice as high as the price for which the same work is done in non-union shops by boy and girl labour and underpaid adults. It is obvious that if one employer can pay 36s. a week, when supplying the same market as another who pays only 20s., there is no economic advantage to society in permitting the latter to fill his own pockets by taking the difference from his work people. It is true that all the difference is not gain to him. The better employer may, and often does, make a higher profit, but that is because he is better equipped for business, has newer machinery, larger resources, better credit, and an enormous turnover. But it is clearly to the advantage of society that all the work should be done with the best appliances. If you can imagine the enforcement of the union principles throughout that trade, no matter by what means, the higher payment to labour would not cost the consumer anything more. Prices might remain exactly as they are now. The only difference would be that instead of the large number of underpaid work people you would have a smaller number doing the same amount of work with better appliances, and enabled to live in comparative comfort."

"Thus, in trades where foreign competition does not affect prices, there would be a great economic advantage in the maintenance of a

high rate of wages. You will say that even so a number would be thrown out of work—and that is true as matters stand. But you will hardly argue that it is better that the larger number should find employment owing to obsolete appliances and slipshod methods and the great waste caused by operations on a small scale. Those thrown out of work would, under present conditions, starve; but the trade unionist principle for providing for them is to reduce the working hours in the trade, so that they may find work in lightening the toil of their fellows who are in employment. If this is done so effectively as to attain the object, it no doubt entails increased cost of production, which can only be met in one of two ways—still better methods and machinery, or a rise in the price of the product. The latter alternative must of course be considered separately as regards articles which can be sent in from other countries. But I am now considering those trades which must be carried on within our own borders."

"Take the baking trade for example. If all the loaves in London were to be baked by men working under trade union conditions, the immediate effect would be to shut up hundreds of the smaller establishments where the work is carried on in the most inefficient and, from an economical point of view, costly way. All the baking could and would be done in the larger establishments equipped and worked on a scale which at present, with the current prices of flour—the raw material—and loaves—the finished product—allow trade union rate of wages and hours of labour to be observed. In other words, all the work would be done with fewer men at a higher average wage. But what is to become of the bakers, who, thrown out of employment, will not have even a starvation wage to live upon? Trade-unionism says that even the shortest hours now worked in the trade—ten per day or night—are far too long. Any doctor will say the same. Trade-unionism would cut down the hours from ten to eight, and give to the unemployed an opportunity to work by thus reducing the normal hours. Speaking roughly, and without laying undue emphasis upon the accuracy of the proportion, it will require five bakers working eight hours to bake as many loaves as four bakers in ten hours. That is 25 per cent. more men would be required. If the rate of wages were



maintained this would be an increase of 25 per cent. in the master baker's wage bill, and he might in addition be at the expense of more ovens, etc., for the same output of loaves. The increased outlay must come from somewhere, if not out of the employers' profits, then out of the pockets of the customer in the shape of a farthing on the 4lb loaf."

"I fancy I hear a scream at this proposition, 'increase the price of the food of the people?' But it does not frighten me. The landlords did it before the repeal of the Corn Laws to fill their own pockets. The capitalists do it now without any scruple to fill their own pockets. And the working class, when it is in power, will assuredly do it to fill its own pockets—for that is just what higher wages, shorter hours, and steadier employment mean."

"The workman is not in the least alarmed about the consequent damage to the consumer, or fearful that he, as a consumer, will suffer. He knows that high prices just mean that the people who have sovereigns get fewer loaves, or boots, or what not for each of them. It means the same thing for each of the workman's shillings too, but he understands that a change which will give him 50 per cent. more shillings while each of them will buy 10 per cent. less in commodities, is wholly to his advantage. The loss will fall on the consumers who are consumers only, the non-producing class, who, since they earn no wages, will not benefit by the rise in them, and will find every sovereign of their income worth only 18/-. I recognise that this does not touch the difficulties presented by foreign competition and the export trade. They demand and shall have separate treatment."

"Well," said Dr. Burton, "you have certainly forestalled a good deal of what I had to say. You leave me speechless with your airy assumption that cheap production is no benefit to the working classes, and that the evils of Protection are a myth. You talk as if Bright and Cobden had never existed."

"Pardon me," said Blake, "I never said cheap production was no benefit to the workers. It is, when

it results from a saving in labour. It is not, when it results from a saving in wages. There's all the difference in the world between the two things, and it's because the Freetraders don't see it that they're in such a hopeless fog."

"I can't make it out," said Ida.

"Then let me put the converse case. If cheap production and low prices are an advantage, let us go to the bakers in the trade union and point out to them that instead of trying to raise wages to the union rate of 27s. they should consent to their reduction to 18s., and instead of asking for an eight hour day they should insist on working twelve hours. The price of bread could then, no doubt, be reduced considerably, and the 'food of the people' would not be taxed to keep the journeymen bakers in comparative luxury and idleness! Mr. Mortimer could hunt up instances of men who have worked twelve hours a day at three-pence an hour, and yet managed to save money, educate themselves, and become prosperous on such a regimen! We might point out to them that this change would be highly advantageous to the working class, including themselves, and that in that way lies economic salvation!"

"I must say," Ida admitted, "that it does sound absurd when you put it that way. But is that the real meaning of 'buying in the cheapest market'?"

"Yes, it is, and the fact was pointed out during the Anti-Corn Law agitation by the true spokesmen of the working class, the Chartists. Ernest Jones and Bronterre O'Brien were thrown off Anti-Corn Law



platforms when they tried to speak as I have just spoken. They were before their time. But the day will come when the British working classes will erect statues to them, and tear down those of the Free-trade orators."

"That's all very fine," said Mortimer; "I'm a bit of Free-trader myself, and believe that after all Dizzy was right in that matter. But how do you account for the fact that all your working class politicians and trade union leaders are Free-traders to a man?"

"I say they are not anything of the sort," retorted Blake. "They say they are, and a good many of them have been bought over by the Free-trade Party in their capacity of political adventurers. But the sum and substance of Trade Unionist principles and of Protection are identical, as we shall see when we discuss the trades that are affected by foreign competition."

"Then does that account," asked Dr. Burton, "for the hostility between Liberals and Socialists?"

"Yes, to some extent," returned Blake; "and as a matter of fact the Liberal capitalist carries out the 'buy cheap' theory in his own business much more logically and harshly than does the Tory. I have as much experience as most men, and I think that nine out of ten of the really outrageously grinding capitalists I have come across have been enthusiastic Liberals."

"I don't doubt it," said Mortimer, warmly. "It makes me sick to hear these sweaters denouncing landlords as greedy tyrants. In spite of the fact that the landlords have been ruined recently, you are always hearing of their remitting rents right and left to help

their tenants over the bad times. Who ever heard of a manufacturer voluntarily raising his rate of wages because times were bad and work scarce?"

"You see," said Blake, "there is still left something of the feudal relations and the personal tie between landlord and tenant in the country. We are none of us altogether guided by the Gospel of Gradgrind in our personal relations. I don't suppose even you, if you bought your shirts direct from the woman who made them, would consider it an outrage if she asked to be paid at the rate of twopence an hour. But you don't and can't buy your shirts direct from her, and so it's very possible that you are at this moment clad in a garment stitched by a mother, who could not, though she wore herself to the bone over the work, get enough by it to buy sufficient nourishment for her dying child. And when we, seeing that the personal relations are gone for ever, and cannot be re-established, strive to put in their place regulations suitable to the altered conditions of industry, you want us hanged for our pains!"

"You don't think," said Mortimer, in a subdued tone, "that I want the shirts made in that way, or like to think of it?"

"No, and if you'd take the trouble to go and see what actually goes on; what is the real result of free competition; the benefits that have accrued from the partial application of socialist principles, whether by trade unions or by factory regulations; you wouldn't talk as you do. Nor would you be inclined to laugh at the follies and extravagances of the people who see the



evils very clearly, but haven't got the sense or patience to argue about them, and don't affect the tone and language of the drawing-room and the club. So you and your like, as far as you influence matters at all, only breed bad blood and inflame passion."

"But there is the objection," put in Dr. Burton, "that all this regulation, cramping the liberty of action of employers and employed alike, will have a deteriorating effect on character."

"Again I must ask you," said Blake, "to think of the effect on character of the present system. You can find in half-a-dozen Blue Books gruesome accounts of the condition of operative bakers at their work, in noisome, unventilated underground cellars, which they only leave to give them enough sleep to enable them to go on from day to day, until they drop off into premature graves, leaving a stunted and sickly offspring to fill their places. In what sense of the words can you talk about curtailing the 'liberty' of thought and action for such men as these? Don't you see that regulations, whether enforced by trade unions, or by the law, with its inspectors, magistrates, and police, if it can gain for them a few hours not occupied either by work or sleep, will give them a thousand times more freedom than they can ever know under the system of free contract? Don't be fooled by words and phrases. Go and look at the facts."

"You're right, Mr. Blake," said Ida. "I feel exactly like that when people tell us that women are free to do as they like in this country. Nobody will understand that freedom consists not in the absence of prohibition, but in the presence of opportunity."

"Well done, Miss Burton, that's just it," said Blake. "The black slave of the West Indian plantations worked only forty-eight hours a week. On London tramways the men work sixteen hours a day. I have myself convicted a publican of keeping a boy at work for 106 hours in a week. I don't think that boy's real freedom and liberty of development would have been much decreased by changing places with Sambo."

"Ah, but he would not change places with Sambo for all that," said Dr. Burton. "And I don't believe that you want him to, either."

"Quite seriously," said Blake, "I don't know that there is much to choose between them. I saw once an advertisement for a footman, whose duties were to be to carry a lap-dog, and it was stipulated that his whiskers must match the colour of the dog's coat. How is that for 'the dignity and freedom of labour'?"

"Yes, but the present system," Burton went on, "gives the possibilities of progress, and every restriction is a bar to it."

"Now, who on earth," said Blake, turning to Miss Burton, "would suppose that your brother was himself a member of one of the strongest trades unions in existence? He can't practice at all unless he meets the requirements of the standard of knowledge fixed for him by other people, and professes his belief in a number of tenets which are year by year abandoned. He mustn't advertise his capacities, because the trade union won't allow it. He must only accept certain remuneration, and enforce its payment in certain ways. If his individual ability leads him to conclusions opposed



to the common (and usually mistaken) belief of the other members of the union, they will drum him out of it, and prevent, as far as they can, his new ideas having a chance to survive by free competition with the old ones. And yet, to hear him talk, you would think that medicine must be absolutely ruined and rendered incapable of any further development by such a recognition amongst its professors of the baleful principles of restriction and regulation."

"I don't see that Mr. Mortimer is in any better case," said Ida, laughing; "for he's a trade unionist too, though I am afraid a briefless barrister must be counted as one of the unemployed."

"I know I wish," said Mortimer, "that our trade union would do something to take their superfluity of briefs from some of the Q.C's., and distribute them amongst the junior Bar. And a limitation of the number of barristers might give one a better chance."

"Upon my word," said Blake, laughing, "it would serve you fellows right if I were to spend an hour in pointing out to you how beneficial to the community would be free trade in Law and Medicine. We shouldn't have so much costly litigation or such long doctors' bills, and I, at any rate, can see great advantages in cheapening the cost of production of verdicts and burial certificates. But I haven't got the time to chaff you to-night."

## CHAPTER X.

"I ADMIT you made good your point," said Dr. Burton, "that the enforcement of trade union principles would benefit the working class, as it would secure to them a larger share of the national income. In trades which are free from foreign rivals the effect must be all to their advantage. But I don't see where you're going to stop. Would you go on, as inventions are applied, to continuous reductions of the hours of labour?"

"Why not?" replied Blake. "Improved processes now affect the worker disastrously. In the long run he gets a small advantage by the reduction in price but the displacement of labour increases competition and makes it more difficult for him to find employment even at a lower wage. My proposal, or rather the trade unionist proposal, would simply give to the working class a large proportion of the gain due to better processes of production. It would make these appliances labour-saving in the true sense. The ideal to be aimed at is that when a machine is introduced that enables one man to do the work of ten, instead of nine men being thrown out of employment, all of them should get some share of the benefit by working shorter hours. Is that unreasonable or Utopian?"

"It's very nice indeed from the working class point of view," Burton admitted, "but what about foreign competition?"



"I'll deal with that now," said Blake, and he commenced to read:—

"There is no sensible man who does not see the enormous advantages of Freetrade—in the abstract. For it simply means that manufactures and industries should be carried on in the countries best fitted for them by nature. To take an extreme instance as an illustration—oranges can be grown in England—in hot houses at a cost of about half a sovereign apiece. We can all see that it would be grossly uneconomical to do anything of the sort, and it is better for both countries that we should raise coal and iron in England, use them in manufacture suitable to the country, and exchange the products, without let or hindrance, for oranges grown in Spain. So far as Freetrade means, then, the unhindered exchange by each country of the products it can create most readily, we are all in favour of it."

"If we come down to the actual facts of foreign competition, we find that the foreign article beats the home-made one, for one of three reasons: either because the home country is not by climate, geographical position, or other natural causes so well fitted for that kind of production; or because the trade is not carried on with sufficient skill at home by employers or employed alike; or, in the third case, because, though we have equal natural advantages and equal skill, the cost of labour here is greater than it is in the competing countries. In the first case, any form of Protection is uneconomical; it would cause the production to take place in countries whose conditions involve waste and misapplication of capital and labour—as with our hot-house oranges. In the second case, Protection would put a premium on incompetence and laziness on the part of the home producer; it would tax the consuming community to subsidise bad work. It is in the last case only that trade unionism insists on Protection."

"A trade union aims at fixing a standard of minimum wage. It says you must pay, let us say, a pound a week at least, though you are at liberty to pay as much more as you like for special skill and industry. It thus shifts the burden of competition, partially at any rate, off the employed on to the employer. It insists that all

employers in the trade should start level in the matter of wages, and, that being secured, is quite willing that they should compete as hard as they please in all other matters, and rejoices at any cheapness resulting from such competition. See how the thing works in practice. Employer A is producing boots and paying a pound a week to his average hand. Employer B comes along, and being a smart man of business, sees that there is a fortune in selling boots cheaper if you pay your hands 2s. a week less than A does. B calls this 'enterprise,' but its result is that A must now reduce wages by 2s. because B has lowered the price of boots. This sort of competition goes on between employers until the workers, who bear the brunt of it, are driven down to a starvation wage."

"Now, suppose I bring over a shipload of cheap labour—Germans, Belgians, Italians, or Orientals—and start them at work in any trade. Their work is not so good as that of native labour, but the difference in price—the difference between the standards of subsistence demanded—is so great that I can undersell my British competitors. Production will be cheapened, no doubt, but at what a real cost! It simply means that you replace with members of a lower race a portion of your native population, which is the best result, emigrates to other lands, and, in the worst event, quarters itself upon the community as a pauper or criminal class. Whatever else this may be, it is not true economy. The trade union, however, does not object to it on any ground of high doctrine, but from the most selfish motives. To its members it means starvation, and they don't like it, and must inevitably use all their forces against it."

"Nor is the effect changed if, instead of bringing my Polish salt-workers to Cheshire, or my Chinese cabinetmakers to Bethnal Green, or my Saxon hosiery operatives to Nottingham, or my Russian boot-closers to Northampton, I display my enterprise by going to the original habitat of these aliens, and, putting up factories there with British capital, patents, machinery, managers, and foremen, undersell the British worker. But under the wage system Freetrade means just this. It is going on every day. Trade unionism objects to the non-unionist accepting 19s. instead of 20s. It would boycott him and refuse to work with him. It would treat him as an outlaw and put



a price on his head. It feels even more bitterly towards the foreign worker, who in certain trades accepts 12s. or 15s. as against the 20s. Ask any baker, hairdresser, or clerk in London what he thinks of the influx of Germans. He has less prejudice against them as Germans than ever he had; but as underselling competitors in the labour market he hates them, and would exclude them from our shores. It is not so easy to see the effect of this competition when it comes, not in the shape of workers to flood the market for labour, but in the shape of the products of those workers to flood the market for goods. So it happens that it is the commonest thing in the world to hear the ordinary Freetrade Radical expounding, as a trade unionist, undiluted Protection in his views about "blacklegs," English and foreign. That the logical consequence of trade unionism is Protection is not yet fully recognised, but it is as certain that the labour class will use their political power in a trade unionist sense, as it is that they vote for fair (as opposed to competition) wages to Government and municipal employees. The working class State will exclude the products of any countries which produce more cheaply than do our own workpeople, when and if it is persuaded that this cheaper production is due solely to cheaper labour."

"Now, I have pointed out that though better conditions for the workman and shorter hours necessitate higher prices, it is obvious that higher prices arising from these causes do not injure the working class. They fall with great severity upon the non-producing consumer, the purchasing power of whose income will diminish. That, of course, will be a matter of delight to the working classes, who have never been able to see how the existence of those who neither toil nor spin can be anything but a dead weight upon the community. In support of my view, I must remind you that all democratic countries are strongly Protectionist, and that where the working class vote has most influence there the objections to 'pauper foreign labour' are most marked. I hope that none of you will tell me that it benefits the workman for goods to be produced where they can be made cheapest. The theory of the Freetrader, of course, is that if any trade is killed by foreign competition the workmen in it immediately turn to some more profitable, because more suitable, industry. The theory might

hold good if you had Freetrade all over the world, and the same standard of life and the same rate of wages prevailed amongst the competing nations. But as things are, the tendency of Freetrade is to give the trade of the world to the races which can live on the least and are lowest in the scale. At any rate, you will agree with me that it is quite futile for trade unions to try and keep wages in England much above the amount paid by foreign manufacturers who have free access to our home markets. That can only result in disaster to both men and masters. It demonstrates the antagonism between trades unionism and Freetrade.

"I understand quite clearly," said Dr. Burton, "what you are driving at, and granting your hypothesis, that the nation is going to model its policy, industrial and fiscal, so as to raise the price of labour, it is intelligible enough. But I'm afraid that in practice you would find that the workmen in unsuitable trades, and those who were beaten by foreigners because they were incompetent, would not listen to you when you refused them the Protection you extended to others."

"I told you I didn't expect to alter human nature, or to get men to take large views when their personal interests are threatened. You would have that difficulty to meet. It exists in all Protectionist countries. In them every unsuccessful employer clamours for Protection and very often gets it, with the result that labour is directed to unprofitable channels, truly unprofitable because it might be better applied to other purposes. But these difficulties only exist to be overcome. Each case must be examined on its merits, and it would surely not be beyond the reach of human reason to decide whether the cheaper price of the foreign article was really due to the labour employed upon it being paid at less than the home standard."



"But, isn't it found," urged Dr. Burton, "that these things are best left to be settled by the free play of competition? You admit yourself that under universal Free-trade each country would devote itself to the industries for which it was best suited by nature, with the result of a real economy in labour all round?"

"That is," returned Blake, "the whole force of the Free-trade argument. It is not wrong but right—so far as it goes. Where it fails is that it omits to take into account the differences in the money payment to labour in different countries."

"I remember hearing," said Mortimer, "of a Scottish firm of ironfounders, of which the principals had trouble with their workmen, who objected to a reduction in wages necessitated by foreign competition. The firm brought over some foreign workmen, and employed them alongside of the Scotchmen, paying them something like half the rate. I was told that the object lesson was a great success, and there's not a Free-trader in those works now."

"I can quite believe it," said Blake, "and a few more object lessons of the kind would do no harm."

"I believe," Mortimer went on, "that employers as a whole would not object to see your view enforced. It doesn't matter in the least to them whether they pay their men £1 or £5 a week so long as they get the same profit themselves. But you alarm me with your suggestion that the result would be to impoverish the wealthy classes. It's all very well to talk of reducing the purchasing power of people with fixed incomes. But what does that mean? Simply that they employ fewer people!"

"Yes; your economical theory is that the rich people are conferring a benefit upon the poor by allowing them to act as footmen and grooms. The landlord, you say, spends his rents in giving employment. Reduce his rents, and he dismisses a gardener or a coachman, and there's so much less employment. You forget that the farmers' incomes are increased by the precise amount that the landlord forgoes, and that the increase in their purchasing power gives more employment."

"I never could make out," said Ida, "what the real reasons were against spending money on luxuries. It seems wrong and wasteful, but there are whole classes of work people, chiefly women, whose occupation and living would be gone if it were not for the fine ladies. Do explain it?"

"If you go out and order a dozen dresses," said Blake, "you do make things better for the dress-makers, because, things being as they are, the greater demand there is for their labour the better for them. The late Duke of Portland, when he built those underground riding schools and so on at Welbeck, was conferring an immediate benefit on the unemployed in the district."

"But I can see," said Ida, "that that was sheer waste. To devote to the satisfaction of insane whims the labour of thousands of men which might have been used to make the earth more fruitful, to drain another Chat Moss!"

"Exactly; you see in the latter case that the labour was wasted, just as it would be if I paid a lot of unemployed men to dig holes and fill them up again. They would



be better off but the world would be the poorer for their labour, which would have been wasted."

"Then do you mean that labour applied to nice dresses and pretty bonnets is wasted?" Ida asked.

"There are far too few pretty things in this world for one to grudge those their existence," said Blake. "You might as well accuse me of thinking that the building of Westminster Abbey was a waste of labour. I will try and explain what I mean," he went on, taking a sovereign out of his pocket. "Now this coin, no matter how I got it, whether in payment for work done, or because I inherited an acre of land or a railway share, simply represents a draft on labour. At current prices in England this will buy three days of skilled or six of unskilled labour. It is no use to me unless I spend it in employing some one. Even if I put it in a bank the banker will lend it to someone who will use it in buying things and giving employment. I, being the possessor of this coin, have the option of buying a hat or a bottle of champagne or a book, and so of directing labour to the production of anything I choose. The employment is given, any way. The whole question is whether labour is directed to the production of one thing or another, to something useful and beautiful or useless and ugly. If I buy a bottle of champagne, somewhere at the end of a series of exchanges, a man has worked a week for my half-hour of gratification. Is that the best use to which the labour could be applied? If I give it to a man in the street it may direct labour to the production of food and firing, clothing and shelter for his wife and family for a week. Take a bigger case. Not long since, a young man

spent a fortune of a quarter of a million of money in a couple of years. That afforded a good deal of employment of a kind, but there is absolutely nothing to show for it now. He might have employed five thousand navvies for a year on some engineering work that would have made life easier to a province for half-a-dozen generations. If you remember, that a coin is simply an order upon the work of the world you will see that it isn't the spending of money anyhow that is beneficial, but the spending of it so as to direct labour into useful channels."

"But I must have dresses," pleaded Ida.

"Yes," said Blake, "but you must remember that there is a great deal of labour expended on them, and that if you are not returning the equivalent in labour you are carrying on that sort of exchange which is a robbery."

"But, my dear sir," put in Mortimer, "we may assume that Miss Burton pays her dressmaker's bills."

"Yes," said Blake, "and if she earns the money, or her brother does, with which the bills are paid, some equivalent is given for the labour in her dresses. But how if the money with which she pays her bills comes to her in the shape of rent paid to her by the seamstress, or the shape of dividends on shares in the sewing machine company from whom the seamstress hires her machine?"

"Er—well," said Mortimer, "let me see. I suppose that in that case Miss Burton has the dresses, and has given in exchange lodgings, or her tools of trade, to the seamstress."



"Yes, but what is Miss Burton doing for the seamstress in exchange for what the seamstress does for her? If she is not rendering an equivalent of service, it comes to this, that the poor girl is making Miss Burton's dresses and her own too. It is a simple arithmetical problem after all. If one person consumes without producing, there is some one else producing without consuming. And there you have the problem of poverty in a nutshell."

"Well, then," said Ida, thoughtfully, "one ought not to have more dresses than one is entitled to by the amount of work of one kind or another that one is doing. I recognized before that no one had any right to be idle, and that the society which keeps you in comfort has a legitimate claim upon you. But I didn't see what that really meant."

"Well, you understand now, Ida," said Dr. Burton, "that Mr. Blake and his friends are going to enforce that claim of society."

"That's a fact," said Blake, smiling. "I don't deny that there are scores of men and women in the property class who are well worth their keep. I don't mean people like Darwin or Browning only, but chairmen of quarter sessions and people who take the chair at public dinners even, though that may be going rather far. But the person who consumes a great deal, and contributes nothing to the world but his signature at the foot of cheques, is the real enemy of labour and society too. The world is going to be made too hot to hold him, and at a not very distant future he will have to do his share of the world's work or go."

## CHAPTER XI.

"NOW, Mr. Blake," Dr. Burton commenced, "I don't deny the possibility of your theory, nor even the probability of its application when the working class is in control of the country. It would be quite practicable to keep up a very high standard of comfort and living within the borders of a State, conducted on your principles, that was absolutely cut off from the lowering effects of competition from the rest of the world. There would be loss, no doubt; but I admit the loss would be wholly borne by the non-producing classes you inveigh against. But the whole point is that Great Britain is not such a self-contained country. I will concede, if you like, that we can do without luxuries imported from abroad, and that the nation in the future will have no silk or ribbon, no furs or champagne, no lace or *paté de foie gras*. That would mean no loss to your workmen; but, I presume, you count tea, coffee, cocoa and tobacco, sugar and spices, as amongst their necessities, and these must come from abroad or be foregone. Further, we can't even feed our people by our own products. I have raked up some figures for you on this point. In 1892 we imported the following number of millions of pounds worth of different kinds of food from countries where the standard of living and rates of wages are mostly much lower than our own:—Cereals, thirty-five millions; flour, twelve; butter, sixteen; cheese, three; poultry and eggs, four; fish, two; meat, twenty-eight; vegetables, four; milk, one. That makes a pretty heavy total."



"I admit your figures," responded Blake, "and, if you like, will double that total as representing the amount of necessaries now imported to this country."

"Now," pursued the doctor, "you may say that some proportion of these things could be produced here, but it is clearly not so with the tropical products and with the bulk of the articles of food. And that must all be paid for by our own exports. Those exports must be sold by us at prices fixed by the competition of other nations in the markets of the world. It is already hard enough for our manufacturers to get rid of their commodities in those markets at prices that will pay a profit, even at the present comparatively low wages and long hours of our cotton operatives, mill hands, ironworkers, and miners. If you reduce the profits by your contemplated enormous rise in the price of British labour, good-bye to our export trade! You say that the hands thrown out of work will find employment, on your favourite plan, by reduced hours in the home trade. But there will be nothing then to exchange for these necessary imports. We could only purchase them by drawing on our capital, and the consequent drain would soon bring all your pretty schemes to a standstill. I've never heard any of your friends tackle this aspect of the question."

"I have, though," said Mortimer; "I heard one of them—a member of Parliament too—heckled about it at a meeting by a man who pointed out that higher wages meant the disappearance of the export trade. Your M.P. settled the matter very quickly. 'If,' says he, 'the export trade can't be carried on at fair wages,

damn the export trade!' I ought to apologise, Miss Burton, for repeating this gem of the collective wisdom."

"I don't mind the expression," said Ida; "but if he meant by it, as I suppose he must have done, that the means of livelihood of half the population of Lancashire might go to perdition for all he cared, there aren't words to express his folly and wickedness."

"He didn't say it in Lancashire," remarked Blake, grimly. "He may be a fool, but he's not such a fool as that. I have anticipated your objections, and here is my reply to them."

"It must be remembered that the form of Protection which I urge—the protection of labour from the competition of more poorly paid labour in other countries—does not exclude all foreign imports. We cannot grow tobacco, tea, or oranges in Great Britain, and so far as the selfish interests of our workpeople are concerned, the lower the price of such things the better, for with regard to them they are consumers only. It is, by the way, a charming reflection upon the sincerity of Free-trade as preached and practised in England, that the only things in which the price is raised by duties should be the very things which the working classes consume. You will find hardly a workman who would not take the tax off tea and tobacco and make up for the loss in revenue by an increase in the income tax!"

"Nor does my sort of Protection place any restriction upon Free-trade with countries where labour has the same or a higher standard of living than it enjoys in the United Kingdom. It is the peculiar advantage of the British Empire that it comprises within its area every variety of soil and climate, and that all commodities that can possibly be required are now produced, and can be produced in abundance, within its confines. The fiscal change I propose would not prevent absolute freedom of trade within the Empire, even though it necessitated protection against Germany, Belgium, or



Russia. I am not at the moment considering the political difficulties. I am stating the simple fact that every quarter of wheat, every head of cattle, every pair of fowls, every bushel of vegetables required by the subjects of the Queen, can be grown under the British flag. The same thing is true of every bale of wool, every hogshead of sugar, and every pound of tea. It is a commonplace amongst Freetraders that Protection in the United States is a different thing altogether from what it would be for Great Britain, because they have inter-state Freetrade over a huge continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Florida. The persistent blindness to larger issues which makes the 'little Englander' imagine that his country stretches only from Land's End to John-o'-Groats, and from the Irish Channel to the Wash, prevents him from seeing that England has the opportunity of establishing Freetrade over a territory much larger and more varied than the United States. If it is possible to the Americans, how much more is it feasible for the country 'whose morning drum-beat, following the sun and keeping company with the hours, encircles the whole earth with one continuous and unbroken strain of the martial airs of England.'"

"Meanwhile the export trade must go on. If our manufacturers are to pay high wages and sell at low prices, they must, so long as the export trade is a necessity, be aided by bounties just as the manufacturers of Protectionist countries are. But it is useless to regard the present condition of the export trade as permanent. It is in the development of our home market, using that term so as to include the whole of our colonies and possessions, that we must look in the future. You must remember that the altered conditions of labour in the United Kingdom, by vastly increasing the purchasing power of the masses who are now poorly paid, and by giving a purchasing power to those hundreds of thousands who are out of employment, and therefore a dead weight on the industry of the country, would by itself largely increase the market from which 'foreign pauper labour' was excluded. In the same way the importation of corn from Canada instead of from the United States, of wine from South Australia and the Cape instead of from France and Germany, of wool from New South Wales instead of from the

Argentine, of dairy produce from Victoria instead of Denmark and Normandy, and so on, would mean the increase of the wealth and population of our colonies where the staple industries of England would find an increasing and illimitable market for their surplus. There, too, under the conditions I propose, the English artisan would not meet the competition of the foreigner."

"I am conscious that the magnitude of this proposal is rather staggering, but I do not know that a political movement is any the less likely to succeed because it involves weighty issues that appeal to the imagination and to the larger patriotism. I am well aware, also, that there are two lions in the path. One is that the British electorate is by no means aware that the only chance for permanently maintaining high wages at home together with cheap food, lies in the sort of Customs Union of the Empire that I have sketched out. Without that knowledge being widely diffused no Ministry in England could contemplate the introduction of such changes in our fiscal policy. But that knowledge must spread every day. Take the recent coal strike in the Midlands, for example, with its agitation for 'a living wage.' It is true that at the same prices of coal the pitman might get a considerably better living if he were not taxed by the royalty owner, ground down by the colliery proprietor, fleeced by the railways and plundered by the middleman. But if you introduce all possible economy, abolish royalties, reduce railway rates, and eliminate the middleman, while leaving the barest margin of profit to the colliery company, the pitman will not be perceptibly better off. Similar economies are going on all the time amongst his competitors abroad, and it is flatly impossible in the long run for him to obtain enough wages to maintain him in decent comfort, in the face of the competition of the creatures described in Zola's *Germinal*. To throttle that competition means keeping the price of British coal higher than that ruling in the basins of Northern France and Belgium. So far, so good. But raising the price of coal means raising the cost of production of our exports, and this again, under any conditions except those which I have just sketched above, implies the ruin of thousands of English homes. It may take some time yet, but 'facts are chieft that winna ding,' and the inexorable logic of events must



teach the British electorate that our prosperity must go the way of that of Spain, of Venice, and of Holland, or lead us, whose forefathers secured the greatest empire the world has ever seen, to frame an Imperial policy worthy of our heritage."

"The other great difficulty lies in the indubitable fact that amongst the colonial democracies there is a great distrust and contempt of the mother country under her present rule. Nearly all these colonies exhibit the same hatred of 'the pauper labour of England' as does the English worker of 'pauper foreign labour.' Further, they desire not merely to become grazing or wheat-growing provinces of a great empire, but to enjoy a national life and prosperity of their own. They have so often in the past been taught by painful experience that in any bargain suggested to them by England, her parochial statesmen have considered the interest and wishes of the thirty million British subjects at the centre of the Empire rather than those of the three hundred millions within its total circumference, that they would be glad to loosen the bonds of empire rather than draw them tighter. One can imagine that this feeling would disappear with the smoke from the mouth of the first Russian gun fired in anger at the entrance to one of the Australian harbours or in Table Bay. By that time it would be somewhat late to consider these matters. However, the one need of all the colonies at present is a market for their produce, and they would stand to gain such an enormous advantage from obtaining a monopoly of feeding Great Britain that the matter must receive favourable attention from them."

"The outcome of what I have been saying hitherto is thus 'to establish a ring fence round that portion of the habitable globe in which fair conditions of labour can be realized, with a tariff against the rest of the world in which labour is oppressed.' It may seem to you a wild and impossible dream. If I thought it would not be taxing your imagination too far, I would ask you to consider what would be the effect upon the outside world of the spectacle of such a British Empire. It would, I think, result in our country leading the nations of the earth into the true paths of peaceful progress. As she was the first to destroy the fiction of the right divine of kings to govern wrong, to establish freedom of opinion, and govern-

ment by consent of the governed, and to initiate the labour legislation which industrial development has rendered necessary, so England would be the first to show how rightly to enjoy the fruits of Man's control over Nature."

"Well, upon my word," said Dr. Burton, "I didn't expect this. Your deliverance is worthy of Mortimer in one of his most truculent Jingo moods."

"I believe you are right after all, Mr. Blake," said Mortimer, "and that there is more in common between us than I had supposed. But I must insist that I have never heard your socialist friends talk like that. If I had, I might have thought better of them."

Blake shrugged his shoulders. "I don't see how you can expect anything better. *Gegen dummheit kämpfen Götter selbst vergebens.* The ignorant are ignorant, and there's an end of it. I remember once in Australia talking to a young man about Highland scenery. He asked me if the whole of Scotland had been explored yet! You can't expect very healthy ideas about the future of our race from such a specimen of it, any more than you can expect profound wisdom from the ordinary English labour agitator."

"And yet," cried Mortimer, "it is to such people that the destinies of the empire are committed, under your ridiculous democratic theories."

"I don't think so at all," replied Blake. "Your idea of democracy is just the counting of noses. Now, I quite agree that the will of the majority must be obeyed, and probably go further than you do in thinking the majority distressingly ignorant, for I should count among them a very large proportion indeed of



the 'educated classes.' But I know that in a democracy, distribute the votes as equally as you like, the strong man who has the facts on his side will have his way."

"Then you aren't a democrat at all," cried Mortimer.

"Oh dear, yes," Blake replied. "But I am not going to alter my opinions, no, nor despair of their triumph, because a lot of people who don't know or won't see the facts, disagree with me. Give me the facts on my side and the right of free discussion, and I have no fear as to the results."

"That's very modest of you," remarked Ida.

"Well, you see, Miss Burton, I am not backing my own judgment because it is my own, but I am backing the facts because I believe them to be true. Mr. Mortimer chooses to think that democracy consists of bowing down oneself in the house of Rimmon—yielding to the popular will because it happens to be all-powerful. Your modern politician isn't a democrat at all. He is simply a courtier before King Demos, as he would have been before any other king, or a sycophant under an oligarchy. I admit that government must rest upon the popular will, but it is my business as a good democrat to alter that popular will when it is wrong, not to let it alter mine."

"And what's going to become of the other countries under the coming dispensation?" asked Ida. "You don't seem to care what becomes of them."

"No," said Mortimer, "there isn't much blatant cosmopolitanism about him."

"I think our first concern," said Blake, "should be for our own people. And I can't conceive that I can rightly interfere with the affairs of other countries until those of my own are less of a shame to me."

"Oh, but, Mr. Blake, you're going to put a fence round the British Empire and order off it all the oppressed of other nations who seek refuge on its shores!" said Ida. "What becomes of the brotherhood of man under those circumstances?"

"I'm fond of animals, Miss Burton," said Blake, "and would give shelter to a homeless dog. Still, I should think twice about taking in a stray tiger. The laws of hospitality don't compel you to allow yourself to be eaten out of house and home. I would let any foreigner come and live here, or send his goods here, provided he agreed with the conditions."

"Ah!" ejaculated Dr. Burton, "'be my brother or I will slay thee.'"

"No," said Blake, laughing. "'Be my brother, but promise you won't take advantage of my brotherliness to slay me.' I have the same objection to the foreigner as the trade unionist has to the 'black-leg,' and for the same reason. If he takes the bread out of my mouth, calling him my brother doesn't alter the fact that he is my enemy."

"Do you really suppose," said Dr. Burton, "that any such Customs Union of the Empire is possible within our generation?"

"Most certainly I do," Blake replied, "and, furthermore, I think that if it doesn't come about then, it will never come about at all."



"Well, I should like to see it, for one," said Mortimer.

"Are you quite sure of that?" enquired Blake. "You must remember that they are very fiery democrats in the colonies, and before they can have any closer union with us, they must have solid guarantees that they are entering into an alliance, not with the educated classes in England, but with the common people. You will have to submit to universal suffrage, payment of members, the disestablishment of landlordism, the annihilation of the hereditary principle of legislation, and a good many more things of the same kind, before the British lion would be able to confer with his cubs on equal terms. But those things will come about in England sooner than you think, Look back fifteen years; estimate the rate at which things are moving, and you will agree with me."

## CHAPTER XII.

"NOW, I say," said Mortimer, at the commencement of the next discussion, "I have got one objection to raise against all you've been saying that I fancy will take the wind out of your sails. Whatever else you've been preaching, it isn't Socialism."

"How do you mean?" asked Blake.

"I have been making inquiries from some of the experts, and I find that your socialist philosophers declare that their ideals are 'in politics Democracy, in property and industry Communism, and in religion Humanism,' or something of that sort. And the man in the street, for whom you so persistently decline responsibility, says that what the socialists want is the

nationalization of the means of production, distribution and exchange; which being interpreted is, that everything used in wealth-making is to be placed in the hands of the State. Now you shirk the whole of this."

"Perhaps Mr. Blake hasn't got so far yet," Ida suggested. "He has shown us that the working-class idea is expressed in the essential principles of trade unionism, and that these, carried out to their logical conclusion, involve a certain policy on the part of a State after it has passed through the commercial stage, and come under the control of the working classes."

"Mr. Mortimer is a little too previous," said Blake, "I will accept Miss Burton's summary of my exposition as far as it goes, and carry it on a little further." Then he began.—

"There are two ways in which the State, when dominated by the working classes, can interfere on their behalf. The one that I have described consists in the regulation of industry while it is still left in private hands. In this respect the Legislature simply does more effectively what, as I have shown you, the trade union attempts to do with its more limited powers. It says to the owner of property and to the employer of labour, 'This property of yours has come into your hands, and the State protects it from depredation. Hitherto it has been regarded as belonging to you solely, and you have been permitted to do with it exactly as you pleased. But now we have a different conception of property, and see that the enforcement of its absolute rights, without any provision for the fulfilment of any duties, is a one-sided arrangement which leads to national ruin. Appeal has been made to you property-owners, upon religious and ethical grounds, to regard your property as a trust. The results show that this appeal has been fruitless. We now propose, therefore, to enforce the duties of property. Here is the national land and capital. You have control, and you may keep it, but on the one condition that you so administer it that all classes obtain therefrom the means of comfort and decency.'"



"Now it must in fairness be pointed out that there is nothing in such a State policy that conflicts with the older and better traditions of English Toryism. The old High Tory was the lineal descendant of the believers in feudalism, and feudalism, as we have seen, was based upon the principle that there was a national life in which each class played its part, with very definite duties and obligations to the others. The Liberal Party, on the other hand, is descended from those who chafed at the restrictions imposed by a demarcation of classes which had become obsolete and arbitrary, and at the ties which hampered the development of society under capitalism. For that development Freetrade—free competition—was necessary, and these party cries express the exact antithesis of the labour idea. There you have the real reason of the bitter hostility between the Labour Party and the Liberals."

"You will notice that the British State has already gone to very great lengths in the direction of thus enforcing the duties of property. The Poor Law itself concedes the right of men who are unable to get their own living to quarter themselves upon the propertied class. The Education Acts make us pay for the training of the children of the poor. The Factories and Mines Regulation Acts lay down very strict limitations within which only may the employer carry on the exploitation of his hands. It is admitted that there is a tendency to increase this sort of Socialism. Everyone knows that great progress in it is the political work of the immediate future. Recent history shows us that it matters little which party may be nominally in power. Each in turn is compelled, however reluctantly and inefficiently, to carry out the popular mandate for that kind of legislation. In the end, whether that end be near or remote, this will lead to the protection of labour from the pressure of competition within and without the borders of our State. All this can be seen by anyone who cares to look beyond the immediate present."

"Industry then will no longer be carried on for the benefit of those who live without working—upon rent and interest—but for the benefit of the dominant class. I can conceive a State in which the wage system, under this modified form of capitalism, would allow of a condition of affairs which, as compared to the present, would

be almost millennial. But it must be remembered that in the system of production for profit there are inherent evils which cannot be destroyed without the destruction of the system itself. Assume that you have reduced the burden on industry represented by the tribute now levied by the non-producing classes for permission to use land and capital; assume that you have the entire working class in steady employment at good wages and under healthy conditions, and though much will be done, more remains to do. You still have the profit-maker in control of industry, though he is shorn of his power to 'sweat' those who work under him. Nor until the welfare of the community and not the profit of individuals, is the object of all industry, will the welfare of the community be attained. This entails the ownership by the community, through the State, of the sources of life, and their administration by State officials with orders to conduct their departments with a single eye to the prosperity of the State, which then, the propertied classes having become merged in the workers, will present no class distinctions or conflicting interests. But this problem is so surrounded with difficulties that I must defer its consideration."

"But I must point out how much would be gained by the worker by the establishment of the changes that I have shown are immediately practicable. Our present factory laws are notoriously evaded. It may be supposed that further developments of them would be equally inoperative—nay, more so, since it would seem that more complex and multifarious regulations would be still more difficult to enforce. You see, for instance, occasionally in the London season, that Madame So-and-So, a Court dressmaker, has been fined a few shillings under the Factory Acts for keeping girls at work twenty-four hours at a stretch on the garments required in a hurry for a drawing-room. You know, further, that for every prosecution under the Act, there are a thousand breaches of it. The imagination quails before the idea of the army of inspectors that would be required to thoroughly enforce even the existing Acts. They would form a burden on the community, a non-producing class of great size. But the real reason of the failure of the Acts is to be found in the excess of labour over the present



demand for it. Every one of those girls dislikes working all night, and knows perfectly well that in asking her to do so the employer is committing an illegal act. But if she refused or complained she would speedily be thrown out of work, and her place filled by some poor wretch, who, having been out of work for months, was not inclined to be particular as to the terms of employment. But imagine what would be the difference, if, on the lines I have previously described, the law of supply and demand with regard to labour was so regulated that any one of these girls knew she could readily find employment elsewhere next day. She would refuse to work overtime, and threaten to report the circumstance to the factory inspector herself. You would want far fewer inspectors than at present if the workers were able to risk loss of employment. They would act as inspectors themselves, and in a very short time the standard fixed by law would be so generally accepted that no one would dream of reverting to the old conditions, just as now no one would dream of establishing chattel-slavery in England."

"It is this helplessness of the worker in an overcrowded labour market that accounts for so many of our ills. The fact is not taken account of by our philosophers, and vitiates many of their conclusions. It is urged, for instance, that while it may be necessary to protect women or children by legislation, any such interference with the 'freedom' of the adult male is unnecessary. The fact is, that of a boy and a man in the same works, the boy is the more independent of the two. He can risk dismissal with a light heart. It means merely a scolding at home and a holiday until he can get a fresh job. To the grown man, a complaint to the employer, a demand for higher wages, an objection to the sanitary accommodation, or an answer back to the foreman, mean dismissal, and the return to a home where wife and children must go short of the necessaries of life until fresh work is found. To him the holiday is a very different thing, and is so dreaded that he is even less able to protect himself or stand up for himself than the boy."

"It is the misunderstanding of this essential factor in the position of the worker that explains how he can agitate for the legislative restriction of the working day, and yet go straight from a meeting held to demand it to work overtime at his place of employment. It

is no use to say that before asking the State to shorten hours he should voluntarily cease to lengthen them. He has no real choice in the matter. It is true that when asked to work overtime he might refuse, but there would probably be no surer way of marking himself out for dismissal at the first opportunity."

"Well," said Mortimer, "we are getting to it at last! A nice state of things you would bring us to! What a delightful life an employer's would be under these conditions. If he found fault with an incompetent workman or didn't have the whole arrangements to suit the requirements of his hands, they would just walk off, throw down their tools and leave him in the lurch."

"Well, I don't see any objection to that," said Blake, "if they can get work elsewhere."

"But workmen are independent enough now," Mortimer went on, "and Heaven knows what they would be like then!"

"It's all a matter of taste, I suppose," said Blake laughing, "there's no phrase that makes my gorge rise so as that of 'free and independent electors,' as applied to the working classes. I suppose you like the manner of the man who waits upon you in a hairdresser's shop, or of a porter at a railway station, and feel that your possession of a sixpence that your fellow-man hopes to get out of you by servility, is a real advantage to you. You remind me of a very excellent and good-natured old lady I once knew who was leading a fat lap-dog at the end of a chain through a London street. A beggar who was passing and to whom she refused a coin, advising him to go and get work, muttered something about wishing that he was as well fed as the dog. The



worthy woman fumed at the insult for days, and told it to me as an instance of 'the independence of the working classes.' A fact, I assure you!"

"But," said Mortimer, "you know well enough that if workmen had their way they would make the country unbearable, and industry impossible. You admit yourself that in some of these strikes, at any rate, they won't listen to reason, and bring ruin on themselves and everybody connected with them."

"You seem, my dear fellow," rejoined Blake, "in spite of all that I say, to insist that I'm the sort of Democrat who believes the working man can do no wrong. On the contrary, I think he has got his full share of human failings by nature and a good many added vices fostered by his conditions. He will often abuse his power. Every slave that was ever freed has always done so. The servility of the cabman when he expects you to overpay him, is only the other side of the incivility of his demeanour when he finds you have given him his exact fare. You mustn't expect impossibilities from the working class, or that they will not lose their heads a little under the new conditions. Employers will have to condescend to treat them as reasoning beings, to explain the necessity for the arrangements the workmen do not like, to take them into their confidence as being really co-partners in the business, as they will then be. Take my word for it, the good employer who means well by his work-people and will be at the pains to show them that he does so, won't have much difficulty."

"You hear a great deal," said Ida, "about the impertinence, restlessness, and independence of domestic

servants. It is the chief topic of conversation amongst ladies who are always telling you that 'the proper Sphere of Woman is the Home.' As a general rule, I find that the nicest women—the women I think I could make friends with—don't seem to have much difficulty. The complaints generally come from women in whose house I doubt if I could stay a month—as a guest even. I don't wonder that girls prefer the risks and freedom of factory work, to living in some of their houses."

"And you know, moreover, Mortimer," said Dr. Burton, smiling, "that when you say life would be unbearable under these conditions you are assuming that you will still be a briefless barrister, living on a patrimony securely invested in the funds."

"Oh, no," answered Mortimer, resignedly. "Mr. Blake will see to that. He can't reduce my income from my ancestral estates much more. It's nearly disappeared already, but I suppose he will confiscate the trifle of dividends that come to me, or at any rate reduce their purchasing power to zero or thereabouts."

"And then, you know," said Blake, gravely, "you'll have to work. You'll take a different view of these things then, I fancy, and will 'stand by your order' with tremendous zeal."

"I don't see that I shall have much to lose," said Mortimer. "It seems to me that if you ever get your way, it will pay a long sight better to be a workingman than to be anything else. Shall we say six hours a day and three on Saturdays, with a bank holiday once a week in the summer; a clean and airy factory to work



in; no bullying or domineering by those in authority over you, and I suppose £4 or £5 a week, or its equivalent? It doesn't sound so bad!"

"There's no reason why what you say in jest might not be true in earnest. If industry," said Blake, "can be so ordered that to be a workman should only mean what you have described, I don't see after all why you 'gentlemen of no occupation,' should see any terrors in becoming gentlemen of some useful occupation. You remember quite at the beginning of our discussions I told you that my object was to make the working classes ladies and gentlemen. It looks as though the converse of that proposition might not be so very distasteful to you."

"Do you really mean," said Ida, "that anything of the kind is at all possible?"

"It is very foreign to your ideas, and may sound incredible," said Blake, "but I assure you in all soberness it does seem to me that is what we are coming to, and very rapidly, as such things move. It is not a greater change than the one with which we have become familiar as the aristocracy has altered its position. I have said that we make our brewers and bankers peers, but we also make our peers into tradesmen. With our premier earl as a cab-proprietor, a marquis as a coal-dealer, a future duchess behind the counter of a flower shop, the landed gentry turned dairymen and game dealers, and the names of all our old nobility on the boards of hundreds of commercial companies, you must see that commerce has absorbed feudal aristocracy. It is not a much greater change that I propose, and I see the same sort of causes at work to bring it about."

"It's all very wonderful," said Ida, musingly.

"It's not more wonderful," remarked the doctor, "than that man should have lost his tail, or the snake his legs. But I think Mr. Blake is trying to cram the work of long ages into a few generations."

"The wonderful thing to me," said Blake, "is not that the change should come, but that men should not see it coming. I don't wish to lay down the law upon the pace of development. The earlier German socialists used to say that it would take 500 years before the working class had fully established itself in power. The prediction was made a generation ago, but I fancy that those who made it would admit that the pace at which events have travelled since makes a quicker consummation probable. But you cannot prophesy about these things. All that we can do is to observe carefully the changes that are in actual progress under our eyes, and estimate their general tendency."

"I frankly admit, Mr. Blake," said Ida, "that I did you a wrong when I accused you of being in such a tremendous hurry and unwilling to wait for natural developments."

"But I am in a great hurry," said Blake, "about some things, and chiefly about the education and formation of public opinion. There are so many things which could be done at once, as it seems to me, if only the public mind was awake to them. I'll give you an instance of what I mean. Doctors tell you that of the girls who stand behind shop counters and bars for between eighty and ninety hours every week, every year 3,000 in London alone become permanently disabled



and doomed to never-ending torture for the rest of their lives by the effects of the continual standing. Think of the enormous load of useless human misery that statement implies. There is absolutely no need for it. No real harm or inconvenience would result to one living soul if shop hours were much shorter, if seats were provided for the attendants, and they were allowed to use them in the intervals between serving customers. It is ten years since I first knew this. It still goes on. When I think of the thirty thousand helpless women who have been deformed in the interval, I must confess I'm in a hurry. And if I'm impatient in word or action when I think of it, I don't feel inclined to apologise."

### CHAPTER XIII.

AT their next meeting, Blake commenced reading his paper without preliminary:—

"Even if we can imagine that the capitalist system could be so modified by the trade unionist legislation I have described, as to bring about that fairer distribution of the good things of this world that the workman aims at, there would still be the objection that the things produced under it are not so good as they might be. The workman would have the power to purchase what was made, but that would not be altogether satisfactory if the goods were bad. Take the matter of house accommodation, for instance. Be they never so rich, the multitude of men under the present dispensation would be doomed to live in ill-built houses, badly drained, in long unlovely streets, under skies blackened with fog, in an atmosphere in which trees won't grow, and surrounded by a country disfigured and marred by the pursuit of gain. There are towns in which chemicals are manufactured, of which the atmosphere is such that they tell you a bicyclist racing through them will get the bearings of his machine tarnished. A coroner's jury on a boy who fell into

the Irwell found that he was poisoned before he was drowned. Cheap and nasty clothes, adulterated food, and other blessings of commercialism, we shall have with us as long as things are made to sell and not to enjoy, so long as profit and not use is the object of industry."

"How will this ultimate aim of the socialists be realized? It is easy to say that you must nationalize everything, and have it all carried on for public good. But this means, if it is done at once, simply putting in the place of employers, who at least know their business such as it is, a crowd of hungry office-seekers and bureaucrats, who may be nominally the servants of the people, but will really be their masters. What we know of municipal administration in the great American cities, of our own public departments, and of the public services in some of our colonies, is enough to warn sensible men of the danger of finding only the shadow of the public welfare when he seeks the substance of it through Socialism by State or municipal ownership and control. The essentials of its success are that the people must have sufficient leisure and education to keep an eye upon their servants, and that in those servants public spirit must have so far displaced private greed as the ruling motive as to make them capable of doing as good and honest work in public offices as they would in private employment. For myself I must say that these two conditions are as yet not fulfilled in any English-speaking community I know. I would, therefore, always ask myself when any extension of the function of the State as a managing (and not a regulating) power is suggested, whether it is certain that the extension will not lead to jobbery and mismanagement rather than to efficiency and economy. Experiment as much as you like, but do not fall into the mistake of the *doctrinaire*, and suppose that, because public control and ownership of the sources of life is the end to which we are moving, you can fly in the face of facts which clearly demonstrate that every application of your theory must be judged on its own merits and by practical considerations."

"If in this matter 'raw Haste is half-sister to Delay,' delay will answer the problem for us. *Solvitur ambulando*. For in the capitalist system itself may plainly be seen the signs of the aggregation of



huge industrial monopolies, in which the problems of managing by salaried officials acting under elected boards of control are being worked out."

"In the early days of capitalist industry the care, energy and supervision of the individual profit-maker were necessary. With the growth of businesses thus managed, the enormous economy of operations on a large scale became evident. How rapid the development of these concerns has been may be seen from the fact that the largest retail shop in London at the time of the Battle of Waterloo employed only fifteen hands. Now we have huge limited companies transacting almost every kind of business, like the so-called co-operative stores in London, and employing many thousands of hands. In numberless cases they manufacture for themselves the goods they retail to their customers. You have, again, a firm growing tea by the thousand acres in Ceylon, and retailing it in quarter-pound packets at hundreds of shops all over Great Britain. It is obvious that in these cases the difficulties in the way of good management have been overcome. The managers are not the proprietors of their own business. They conduct it for a whole community of shareholders, who themselves know little or nothing about the details, but confide their interests to a board of directors popularly elected (from an electorate of shareholders), who maintain a general supervision. The difference between industries so managed and a State department is, as will be seen, not a very great one."

"It is easy to point out that there is a good deal of difference between the economy and skill in the management of a private concern, where the proprietors, slight as may be the supervision they extend, know all about the business, and have a direct personal interest in seeing that it is carried on properly, and that of a Limited Liability Company, where the knowledge of the proprietors, their interest in its success, and their ability to ensure it, are much less. Hundreds of millions of pounds have no doubt been lost by investors in companies that have been flourishing concerns in private hands. But it may be assumed, without imputing to commercial magnates a worse morality than they profess, that a very large proportion of these failures has been due to the fact that the

decay of the business was anticipated, or had already set in, when they were sold to the public. The fact remains that industries can be carried on successfully under collective control, provided that the owners (the shareholders) will take the trouble and have the sense to elect honest and capable managers. In the same way, I submit, an industry could be carried on in which all citizens were shareholders, provided they had the sense to choose good men for the work of management, and see that they did it."

"It must be remembered, further, that as against the economy of administration of private firms and companies carrying on a business, its conversion into a State monopoly by that act alone would do away with the immense waste caused by competition. Let me take a simple instance. The business of insurance against death is now carried on in Great Britain by over a hundred companies. These are already under State regulation to some extent, and are all subjected to it alike. In their competition with one another to attract customers, they are constantly introducing all sorts of improvements and innovations to meet the requirements and the convenience of the public. It may be admitted that were life insurance made a state monopoly there would not be the same feverish anxiety to improve and perfect the methods on which it is worked. But on the other hand there would be a great saving of labour in the abolition of the competition which leads to these improvements. Fighting against one another in the endeavour to attract business, these companies employ armies of agents, canvassers and clerks, the majority of whom do no useful work whatever, since the efforts of each is directed to frustrate the efforts of the rest. Of all the money they receive, over 20 per cent. goes in the expenses of carrying on the work under competitive conditions. If the business were a State monopoly, 5 per cent. of the income would be an ample allowance for working expenses. Thus, on the one hand, you have, in favour of private enterprise, a greater alacrity in accepting and applying new ideas. On the other, you may say that the public have to pay four or five times as much for the work as if it were done slightly less expeditiously by the State."

"It is certainly evident that if collective enterprise is to be extended, its gravest dangers may be obviated by a diminution of the



of the size of the community which undertakes it. Where national control would mean waste, jobbery, and corruption, municipal control will err rather on the side of niggardliness. No one cares very much whether the national finances are carefully administered. An economical Government gains very little popularity, except, indeed, from those who really benefit by it. In England, the income tax-payer may approve the Chancellor of the Exchequer whose parsimony enables him to take off a penny in the pound. But in municipal affairs, where the effects of extravagance fall directly upon the ratepayers, you find a much greater concern about economy. There are, consequently, very many departments which it might be foolish to entrust to the State, which yet might very prudently be handed over to the local authorities, whose constituents, knowing that they would have to foot the bill, would exercise a sharper and more effective criticism. In course of time we may have a democracy able and willing to devote attention to public affairs in some sort of proportion to their importance. I do not think we have it at present. I should, therefore, be sorry to see hasty applications of this kind of Socialism to our industrial life. The rectitude of the principles would not prevent failure, while the failure would tend to discredit the principles."

"This is too bad," protested Mortimer. "I was going to ask you what you thought of the speed with which trains are run by the nationalized railways on the Continent, and how you liked French tobacco and matches—two charming object lessons as to the capacities of State enterprise. But you've taken precautions to shield yourself from criticism in the most artful way."

"I can only say," repeated Blake, laughing, "that your disappointment comes from your having made up your mind that I must be an absolute idiot because I call myself a socialist."

"And I," said Burton, "was going to have drawn your attention to the astounding incapacity of some of

the socialist institutions in certain of our colonies. I have often thought that it would be well worth while to send some of our ranting socialists over to the other side of the world, to examine for themselves the record of the Lands department of New South Wales or the railways of Victoria. That might prove to them that State control may cost more than it is worth from the pecuniary point of view alone, without taking into account the debauching of public life and civic morality."

"I know a good deal about those things," said Blake, sadly. "Possibly I am not so sanguine as some of my friends, precisely because I do understand the dangers and the difficulties. I see plenty of signs of the same sort of thing in England at the present time. On the London County Council the other day a contract was given to a ship-builder on the Thames, whose tender was higher than others put in by provincial contractors. It was said that this was done because the conditions of the workmen employed could be more easily inspected and sweating more efficiently prevented if the work were done on the Thames than if it were done on the Clyde. But it is difficult not to fear that the object of some of those who voted was to give a bribe to their own constituents."

"It's all of a piece," cried Mortimer, "with the bribery of constituencies which is now the whole stock-in-trade of the Liberal Party. They call it democratic, you know, to give the people, or rather to promise to give them, anything they happen to fancy, especially if it's other people's property."

"I shouldn't object to that," said Blake, "as a definition of democracy, if it were not for the fact that the



people don't know what is good for them. Democracy with an ignorant electorate is a pretty hopeless business. Until the people are really capable of judging, no true democrat will hesitate to back his own judgment against theirs. They won't like it. It's not a popular course. But I believe that in the long run the people will find out that their best friends are not the time-servers and panders, but the men who can withstand passionate but mistaken appeals."

"Ah," said Mortimer, "'*Civium ardor prava jubentium.*'"

"Horace's hero would be a good example for imitation by modern politicians," said Blake. "Speaking for myself, I would rather see my country in the hands of men with whom I didn't agree in the least, if I were certain that they would do what they thought was right without fear, favour, or affection, than in the hands of political tide-waiters and time-servers."

"But haven't we got so far in political democracy," Ida suggested, "that it is impossible for men to be elected to Parliament, or for a party to remain in power, unless they will pay court to King Demos?"

"Well, I don't know," answered Blake; "it looks like it, no doubt. It all depends whether you take short or long views of things. It is quite clear that temporary popularity can best be gained by agreeing with the people from whom you expect favours. But I have sufficient confidence in the common sense of the common people to believe that the quacks and tricksters are found out sooner or later."

"There's one thing I should like to ask," said Mortimer. "You evidently regard the question of

nationalizing property as purely a matter of expediency. If in your opinion the State can carry on a business with advantage to the country, you would nationalize it. May I ask what you propose in your munificence to do with the evicted property-holders? To make paupers of them?"

"I think you must take a concrete case," replied Blake; "shall we say that of these insurance companies? Suppose I thought, as on the whole I do, that the State could carry on that business with advantage to the community, and I had power to do what was good in my own eyes in the matter. I should put my opinion to the test of facts, in the first instance. I would start a State Insurance Department. I would go into the open market, and offering a handsome salary, secure the best experts that could be got for money. I should ask them to construct a State Insurance Department, which would go into the business in competition with the existing companies, and offer the public at cost price the best, safest and cheapest life insurance going. If the experiment failed, there would at least be no great harm done; if it succeeded, and the State Department, therefore, demonstrated its worth, I should offer to incorporate with it the existing companies. Many of these are co-operative institutions, having no proprietors with a profit-making interest to be bought out. In other companies there are shareholders carrying on the business, and making tremendously high dividends out of it. To these I should say, 'How many hundred pounds' worth of Consols are you willing to take for each of your hundred pound shares?' If they would accept a price



I thought reasonable, I would give it and absorb their business into the State Department. On the hypothesis that that department was being successfully worked, and at much less working expense than that of the private companies, the business so bought from them would, in the hands of the State, yield a profit which I should apply as a sinking fund to buy up the Consols that had been issued to purchase it. You will see that this could be done if the price were a reasonable one."

"But suppose," objected Mortimer, "that the shareholders stood out, as they naturally would do, for a price which would not allow the State to make so much profit?"

"In that case I should let the State Department continue its operations. In course of time, if the public found that the State insurance was really a cheaper as well as safer method, you would find that in a very few years the private shareholders would come and ask to have their business taken over at a lower price than had been previously offered them."

"You mean," said Dr. Burton, "that the competition of the State Department would have diminished their business and reduced their profits."

"Yes, if it were well managed that would certainly be the result. If that were not the result, it would be, to my mind, a proof that the business was one which was better in private hands than in those of the State. You will find, if you think of it, that this is really what has happened all through. The State takes up work which is either not done at all or else done badly by individuals. I see no objection to leaving the issue

between State and private enterprise to the free play of competition, always provided that both parties are under the same conditions as to the payment of labour. Of course, if the State is compelled to pay fair wages, and the private employer is not, the latter will win. But, as I have already tried to show, that is not to the public advantage. You can get work done cheaper now by private contract than you can by a public department; but if the low wages and long hours of the contractor mean, as they do, an increase in the paupers and criminals for which the State has to provide, there is no saving in that sort of economy."

"Now, as to the nationalization of the land," said Mortimer. "That is one of the cries of your folk."

"If they mean by that term expropriating the present landlords, vesting their lands in a State department, and so on," said Blake, "I think the democracy hardly capable of controlling such a department. If you mean by that term, regarding the soil, rural and urban, as the national property, instituting fair rents instead of competition rents, compelling the landlords, as a condition of their tenure, to see to it that the land is properly utilised, and that sufficient and sanitary dwellings exist upon it, I don't think that sort of 'nationalization' can be put in hand too soon. But you will observe the principle is already recognized, and only needs to be applied when and where it seems necessary."

"And would you tax land values?" Mortimer asked.

"By all means. The value added to land by the railway system, and the growth of towns, should have gone into public and not private pockets. There is no



earthly reason why that added value should not now be recovered by the public, and it is not beyond the reach of human ingenuity to frame a tax upon land values which would have that desirable result. It need not disrupt society, or cause any sort of harm beyond that which would follow, to those who have enjoyed the unearned increment, from a gradual and continuous diminution of an income which they should never have been allowed to appropriate."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

"**N**OW, Mr. Blake," said Ida, "I do want you to-day to fulfil your promise to show us how all this will affect the position of women. You haven't said a word about it yet, and I have been very patient."

"Very well," said Blake, "I'll give you my view on it." And he began:—

"A very few years ago it would have been impossible to speak as I am now going to speak. There has been a greater change in public opinion about the position of women than even that which has taken place with regard to the emancipation of labour. A generation ago it was the universal opinion that both the oppressed class and the oppressed sex had to accept the position allotted to them, and to make the best of it. It would then have been admitted that the exceptional workman might, if he could, climb out of his sphere into one above it, but such an exception would hardly have been made in favour of the woman whose aspirations were not confined to the immemorial sphere of her sex. Let us see, if we can, what have been the causes of the slow growth of the change of opinion, and its comparatively recent, sudden, and rather startling developments."

"The earlier advocates of the enfranchisement of women confined their efforts to securing for her an education similar to that of

men. Their plea was that the disproportion of the sexes and other causes left a large number of women to whom was denied any opportunity of becoming wives and mothers. In those days the term, 'old maid,' was one of reproach or contempt, or at least of pity. It was pity for the forlorn condition of unmarried women which was the excuse for fitting all women for other activities than the bearing and rearing of children. Men took a lordly attitude, and saw no particular objection to this. Some of the more intelligent thought it might be of indirect advantage to themselves, as tending to provide helpmates who would prove themselves friends of congenial tastes, alive to other interests than those of the household, dress and fancy work."

"The demand so recently inaugurated has risen by leaps and bounds. In the middle and upper classes, to which the movement has been almost entirely confined, the education of women has made great strides. Not unnaturally, girls thus educated look upon life with eyes that see a great deal beside orange flowers and bride-cake, to be followed by incessant care of babies and interminable dissensions with servants. They have discovered that if the joys of married life are a great good, there are many other things in the world well worth having. They want to be something else besides wives and mothers; to have an individual existence over which they have some control; to have interests outside those of keeping the household expenses within the allowance. In a word, whereas marriage was at one time the only career for women, now they want all other careers thrown open to them. Indeed, it is noticeable in the language of many who speak for them, that maternity, under present conditions, seems to be looked upon almost as a curse, and that they hope for a time in which no woman shall be required to undergo its pains and perils except of her own free will. Put in this way, their aim sounds absurd since it may be thought that no girl is compelled to marry against her will, except by the harsh guardian in the novels. But the position of woman, as regards her freedom in this matter, is much the same as that of the workman who is free to accept employment, when to refuse it means starvation. It is true that a girl did not need to marry unless she liked, but it was only by offering herself at the altar that



she could obtain any freedom and a house of her own. The alternative was to become a useless and helpless creature, without any definite place in society, and doomed to a life so purposeless and so trivial that the word 'old maidish' had a familiar significance. Nor has the condition of the married woman been much better. Law and custom made by men have condemned her to absolute dependence upon her lord. In the not unfrequent event of the marriage being a failure, man had plenty of resources and interests—not to speak of pleasures—outside his home. The woman was tied to it, and the penalties for any attempt to escape from the house of bondage were crushing. We don't talk of these things very much—perhaps men can't afford to—but I know that I meet a good many men, and when I try in imagination to picture what the lives of their wives must be, I pity them as much as I do the most unfortunate class of all. It must be remembered that no men enter the marriage contract except from free choice. An alternative is offered to them which does not seem unpleasant, if we may judge from the numbers who avail themselves of it. A very large proportion of women, on the contrary, marry not the man of their choice, but the first who offers them a decent establishment. Common talk shows this in the difference between the congratulations on the marriage of a son and that of a daughter. In the latter case, it is by universal consent a feather in your cap to get your daughter 'settled;' in fact, to get some man who will keep her."

"That women should rebel against the choice between loveless marriage and an empty and purposeless life is not surprising. You will see some very curious developments of this movement before many years have passed. For its real tendency, whether avowed or not, is to put an end to the economical subjection of women. Everything turns on that. So far as middle class women are concerned, it will be an accomplished fact in the next generation. The girl of the immediate future will be as well, or better, able to earn her living than her brother. She is rapidly becoming better educated; she has already demonstrated her ability to beat him in point of pure intellect when she has equal educational advantages; she can hold her own in the occupations at which she has tried her hand. She is more industrious, more methodical, more trust-

worthy, and less addicted to vicious pleasures. Her labour is cheaper, which gives her a great advantage in the competition. Women will overflow from the branches they have already monopolised into nearly all the occupations which their brothers have hitherto monopolised."

"The necessary effect of this, under present conditions, will, of course, have its disadvantages for both sexes. It will increase the number of competitors and reduce their remuneration. It will not bring the woman's standard of comfort up to a set of chambers and a good dinner with a bottle of wine, but will bring the men down to a single room and high tea. But as to the relation between the sexes, the effect of being able to earn a living and make a career and interest for herself—economic independence that is—must have an immense effect upon her view of marriage, and the inducements she will require to face it. Take a family of the middle class, whose present ideas of gentility would not allow the daughters to do any useful work—even if they had the education and ability for it. To-day those girls, horrible as it sounds when put thus baldly, are simply waiting for some man to come along and offer to keep them. Any man will do, provided he is not exceptionally disagreeable, or too poor. In such a family, the views of matrimony of the girls and the boys would be very different. Now, suppose that the girls are put in the same position as the boys; are able to work and earn their own living; to remain at home if they choose, or go and live by themselves, with absolute freedom of choice of companions, pursuits and pleasures. That is what we are coming to. Those girls will not marry the first man who asks them. They will have as much to lose by matrimony as their brothers, and less to gain from it. I think, under those conditions, you will have fewer loveless marriages, and I confess I rejoice at the thought."

"Then again, such a woman who is able to earn a fair living for herself will not, after marriage, submit to neglect or ill-treatment. If her home isn't a happy one, she will leave her husband and go back to her work. The practice will then be so common that it will lose its social odium. Consequently a great many homes that exist now would be broken up. But is there anything much more utterly detestable and flagrantly immoral than a continuance of marriage



between two people who are divorced in thought and sentiment, and merely kept together by a fear of what their neighbours would say if they parted?"

"It will be seen, if you remember what I have said about the wage-worker, that the transformation of the weaker sex from unpaid and dependent housekeepers and nursemaids into 'free and independent' wage-workers will not be an unmixed blessing to them so long as the position of the wage-worker remains what it is. In seeking independence from Man, Woman will be forced to take sides with the wage-worker in his struggle against the unrestricted tyranny of capital. This side of the question is but just now coming to the front, because hitherto the woman's movement has been limited to the upper or middle class women, who have imbibed the capitalist view of the labour question from their surroundings, and have not been brought into contact with the realities of life as it will affect them when they enter the labour market. As doctors or governesses women take the political view that prevails in universities and drawing-rooms. As clerks or compositors working for a weekly wage, they will take the trade unionist view. The success of their assault upon the occupations hitherto confined to men will convert them. Their competition will compel the men to try and make trade unionists of them, and the necessities of their own situation must make them willing to listen."

"Oh," groaned Mortimer, "not satisfied with putting the heel of the workmen upon our necks, we're going to be placed in subjection to women! I little thought that this was what it would come to when the leaders of the Conservative Party began to look with a favourable eye upon Woman's Suffrage!"

"There's to be an end to the Subjection of Women, you mean," said Ida. "I never heard it put before as Mr. Blake puts it, but it expresses exactly what we mean. We want to be free, or to wear fetters only of our own making."

"I'm sure I hope you'll like it," said Mortimer, when you haven't got men to take care of you."

"That's exactly what the Anti-Abolitionists said about the slaves in America," said Blake. "What were they to do without a master to look after them?"

"Look after themselves, of course," said Ida. "I dare say life will lose some of its ease, but think of the pleasure of being somebody and doing something! With your restrictions you make our minds like the Chinese lady's foot. But we'd sooner learn to walk."

"And then," said Mortimer, "you'll lose all the respect and attention that we pay you. You can't eat your cake and have it. As our rivals and competitors you'll no longer be treated with chivalrous regard."

"We don't want to be treated like pets and playthings," retorted Ida. "I know heaps of girls who are now earning their living in the rough work-a-day world, and receive more real deference and respect of the kind worth having than the typical young person. And their marriages are the happiest."

"And then," went on Mortimer, "living in that way they must come across all the hard and ugly facts of life, and lose their innocence and charm."

"Is there anything you know, Fred," said Ida, turning to her brother, "that it will harm me to know?"

"Well, my dear girl," began the doctor, "I by no means believe that ignorance and innocence are convertible terms. But there are a good many subjects that I think women had better not meddle with."

"Ah, you see, Miss Burton," said Blake, "they're afraid of something. What is it? I am not. I would



have all women see the world as it is, and the facts of life as they are. That won't hurt the women who are good, and if they knew, if all mothers knew, I believe the worst evils of modern civilization would be got rid of. While they are kept in ignorance they are unconsciously helping to keep their sex down, hundreds of thousands of them down, in black depths of which a knowledge might sadden, but cannot pollute, the lives of the pure in heart."

"Then I say," said Mortimer, "there's all that about marriage. It will suit some men well enough. But what will happen? If the wife can leave the husband when she likes, the husband must have equal liberty to break the connection when he is tired of it. He will stick to his wife as long as she is young and pretty, and then take another. The marriage laws simply exist to protect women against that sort of thing."

"Do you mean to tell me," asked Ida, "that any wife with a spark of self-respect wants her husband tied to her against his will?"

"She would find it rather awkward," said Mortimer, "to be deserted in middle age."

"But we are assuming," interposed Blake, "if you remember, that the women would be in no worse case from a pecuniary point of view than the man under those circumstances."

"You mean if she could earn her living," Mortimer replied; "but the point is that the man would still have the opportunity to contract a fresh alliance and the woman would not."

"Ah, now we get at Mr. Mortimer's standpoint," said Blake. "He supposes men to take their wives for their youth and good looks solely."

"Well, you know," said Mortimer, "as a matter of fact that is what the average man does, and I don't see how you're going to alter it."

"I haven't the slightest desire to alter the average man," returned Blake. "If that's his ideal of matrimony, I will only say that there's no accounting for tastes. I don't see why women should be sacrificed to it, though; and I'm sure that as they are educated, and lose the ignorance you laud, they will refuse to be sacrificed to it. Men with that ideal will find, when women are economically free, that they can't buy youth and good looks in the marriage market—or any other market. Nor will the man who is known to be inconstant, and to have deserted one wife, stand much of a chance of getting another."

"Then you coolly propose the abolition of the marriage contract?" asked Mortimer.

"Pardon me," returned Blake, "I propose nothing. I think that married couples who do not find happiness in living together are better apart, and I point out to you the real meaning of the tendency you must have observed amongst educated women, to take that rather than the man's view of the question."

"The man's view, forsooth!" ejaculated Mortimer. "Why shouldn't it be as much to his advantage to ignore the sacredness of the marriage tie?"

"For the very good reason," returned Blake, "that he can and does compensate himself for domestic



unhappiness under the existing form of marriage. But perhaps this is one of the subjects that women, who are the injured parties, had best know nothing about?"

"Finally," said Mortimer, "you can't deny that women don't really want anything of this kind. It's only a few of the misfits that rant about it."

"Then if there are so few," said Ida, "why prevent those few doing as they like? Do you know what Olive Schreiner says?—'If the bird *does* like its cage and *does* like its sugar, and will not leave it, why keep the door so very carefully shut? Why not open it only a little? Do they know there is many a bird will not break its wings against the bars, but would fly if the doors were open?'"

"That's just it," said Blake, "they don't know, none of us know, how many women there are who pant for this freedom. Mr. Mortimer talked just now about abolishing marriage. Does he suppose that all women suffer so much from marriage that, if they were free to break the tie, that freedom would be universally made use of? It almost looks like it. Does he suppose that couples that are happy would part? Nothing could make them. It is only the couples that are unhappy to whom it would make any change, and for them and for society the change would be an unalloyed good."

"I'm much surprised, Mr. Blake," said Ida, "that you haven't in all this said a word about the necessity of giving women a vote."

"I don't think the vote is much good to people," replied Blake, "if they don't know how to use it. It is

only a weapon after all, and has no magical properties. Just as I am more concerned that the workman should understand his industrial position than that he should agitate for further democratic change, so I am much more anxious that women should learn what is wanted to free them, than to give them votes they would not know how to use."

"Oh, I'm disappointed in you, Mr. Blake," said Ida; "don't you see that merely having the vote would be a political education in itself for women, just as it has proved to be for the working classes?"

"I admit that readily enough, and I'm in favour of female suffrage, just as I am of every democratic change. But I confess that I rather fear that its effect, where women do not really desire it, might be something like that of putting India under constitutional government. The idea that political enfranchisement is the same thing as social emancipation, is a fetich I am always attacking. But I know very well that it is useless to wait to give women political power until they have political insight. That would be like the man who said he would never go into the water till he could swim. Only I beg you not to expect too much from the vote, but remember always that it is a means, not an end."

"They will certainly never get their special grievances redressed until they are able to bring political pressure to bear," said Ida.

"I quite agree with you," responded Blake, "but it's equally true that they will never get what they want until they know what that is."



"Well," said Ida, "I know a great many of the women who lead the movement, and I can assure you that they ask for the suffrage just because they know that until women have got it all their political interests and knowledge must be at second-hand. They regard it as an essential condition of political education."

"I'm very glad to hear it," replied Blake, "and I will only venture to hope that they will make women take an interest in the labour question; as for my part, I try to show the workmen that they should be on the side of the women's movement."

#### CHAPTER XV.

"**A**ND now," said Dr. Burton to Blake the next time he entered the study, "I want you, if you can, to get over the greatest objection I have left. All that you've said sounds to me feasible enough, on the one condition that men were reasonably wise and good. You may be sanguine about the length of time it would take; but that changes in the direction you point out are inevitable sooner or later, most of us are beginning to believe. But we don't believe in the real efficacy of any outside forces to increase human happiness. That depends upon character, and the change in that must be painfully slow. Your millennium can never come until men are in truth but little lower than the angels, and in a society composed of these your restrictions and laws would be useless trammels."

"I certainly think," said Blake, "that it is possible to look forward to a state of society in which men will not need the pressure of external law, even imposed

upon themselves by themselves, to prevent them trampling each other under foot. That is the anarchist's dream. He believes that if you would abolish all restraints we should get on much better. He thinks that coercion—for that is really what law is—is morally unjustifiable, and that wherever it exists it degrades and brutalizes men. His mistake lies in imagining that the instincts and appetites of civilized men are as wholesome and natural as those of animals and savages. In the self-conscious and civilized man reason has to take the place of instinct. At present he is controlled neither by natural instincts nor by sound reason. There may come a time in which men in a society will fulfil their different functions with as little rivalry and wrongdoing to each other as members of the human organism or the individual bees in a hive. But that time is very distant."

"But you don't mean to say," interpolated Ida "that's all the anarchists want?"

"I suppose, my dear Miss Burton," answered Blake, "that there could hardly be two sections in one society more bitterly opposed to each other than the conservative school of Socialism, to which I belong, and the anarchists. But for all that I feel bound to give them as just treatment as I had to demand from you three opponents at the beginning of these discussions. I don't judge them by my own interpretation of the actions of a few of their number. I go for my information to the writings of the more intelligent and educated among them. I find these gentlemen do not advocate any form of government tempered by assassination. On the contrary, they advocate no government at all—



the abolition of constituted authority. I think it is a noble ideal, and if I could find reasons for sharing the belief that all governments are inherently corrupt, I daresay I should agree with them."

"Then you put down Fred, here," said Ida, "as a mild sort of anarchist?"

"Well, all individualists are anarchists, if they are logical enough. Their theory is that you should not extend the sphere of government, because no government can do anything so well as could the individual citizens by solitary or combined effort without any coercion from outside authority. The individualist Radical says, 'Government is bad; let us have as little of it as possible.' Says the anarchist, 'No, let's have none at all.' The latter believes that if you did away with regulations we should be, if not angels, at any rate healthy and wholesome animals, who would get on admirably without policemen or factory inspectors, State schools or prisons. The socialist, on the other hand, does not fly so high. He admits the existence of evil in human nature, though he does not despair of its elimination. Meanwhile, he would make it easy to do good and difficult to do evil."

"We all quite agree to that," said Mortimer.

"Oh, no, you don't," answered Blake; "you run away with extreme views. There's Dr. Burton, for instance, trying to ride off on the plea that we can't have Socialism without socialists, and that when you've got socialists you won't want Socialism. I quite agree with him that the individual man requires a great deal of improvement before the society can be much better."

"Take your own working men, for instance," said Dr. Burton. "You look to them for this reformation of society—to their use of political power, to their growing intelligence, to their wise use of trade union combination, to their wise use of the increased wages; yet you know perfectly well that good times and flourishing trade mean for the most part more rum and more beer."

"I don't in the least deny," said Blake, "that if you got the English workmen eight bob a day, eight hours work and eight hours sleep, a good proportion of the eight hours play and of their income would go in the publichouse."

"Then I, for one," said Mortimer, emphatically, "don't propose to go without my club and my bottle of claret, my books and my pictures, for such a result."

"But that result needn't follow," insisted Blake. "It is quite feasible, not to prohibit the consumption of alcohol, but, within half a generation, to reduce the consumption by 50 per cent, to almost extirpate excessive drinking, and to diminish towards the vanishing point all the insanity and crime due to drunkenness, and that without any wonderful change in the character of the people."

"I simply don't believe it," said Mortimer, coolly.

"Oh, you practical Englishman!" said Blake, laughing. "You won't believe a thing till you see it, and then it may take several years before you admit its existence. This particular thing has been done. It's no theory, but a fact, demonstrated by experience. In Norway and Sweden the *per capita* consumption of



spirits has been reduced more than 50 per cent. in the last eighteen years."

"Oh, you mean the Gothenburg system?"

"Yes, and that means little more than the application of a slight flavouring of common sense to the problem. At least I am not inclined to think that any radical change in the character of the people can have taken place in so short a time."

"It might suit the Scandinavians very well without suiting us," said Mortimer.

"I should not propose to follow blindly the details of the system as applied in Scandinavia."

"Well, tell us what you do propose," said Ida. "I should think if you could really get the working classes to drink half as much as they do now, that achievement would be worth all the energies of a generation of reformers."

"I would apply just that very socialist principle that you all mistrust, namely, that the public welfare is better attained by putting administration into the hands of men who have no private interests to serve. In Scandinavia the retailing of spirits used to be in the hands of publicans, who, of course, were chiefly actuated by the desire to make the largest possible profit. In other words, they tried to sell as much as possible. The trade has now been put into the hands of companies, who are not allowed to take as profit more than the same rate of interest upon the capital they provide as would be returned to them if they had invested their money in the national debt. They are not allowed to accumulate a reserve larger than their capital. The

consequence of this is that the trade is now in the hands of persons who, without any change in their individual characters, are without any motive to make the trade more than pay its expenses. Any surplus profits must go to objects of public utility, in which no individual shareholder in the company can have any private interest whatever, such as the establishment of parks and museums, improvement of education, etc. The profits must not even be used to diminish taxation or local rates. Thus, you see, this mere mechanical change prevents any one gaining anything from making men drink more than is good for them."

"So that the controllers of the trade have no interest in increasing temptations to drink?" said Ida.

"Exactly. Further, the managers of the publichouses are given instructions to prevent heavy drinking. Their promotion depends upon their having small sales and not large ones to their credit. They are instructed not to serve any one who appears the worse for liquor, and it is to their interest to refuse. They are told not to allow children in the publichouses, and it is to their interest to obey. They are told to supply food and non-intoxicants, and, to induce them to push these, they are given a commission upon the sale of these articles. The natural results follow."

"I see," said Ida, "that under these circumstances it would be very difficult for a man to get too much to drink at a publichouse, and that, in fact, each of these publicans becomes a temperance agent."

"That is just what happens, and I want you to observe that there is no magic in it at all. It is simply



a common sense piece of Socialism. I don't stipulate that the details should be applied to our country, but I contend that the application of the general principle must have a similar result. It is not altering human nature. It is simply taking account of the fact that people are in the main influenced by selfish considerations. If you have a system under which all drink-shops are run by people who have a strong pecuniary motive to get as many sober men as possible within their doors, and to turn them out into the street full of cheap, bad liquor as soon as possible, you don't want to be a socialist to see that you will have a drunken population and a drink problem. If you alter the system so that the motives work all the other way, you will soon reduce the problem to reasonable limits, and in a generation or two, though you may have excess, you won't have tens of thousands of hopeless drunkards to deal with. I think that in England it would be best to municipalise the publichouse, to place the retailing of all alcoholic drinks under the local government, and leave it be modified in any way that the electorate of the district may desire."

"By Jove!" said Dr. Burton, "I begin to see what could be done. You might make the gin palace a real public house, a municipal club, which would give the poorer classes what they so much want and what their own houses can never provide—a place, light and warm and attractive, where they could have rest and comfort; a co-operative restaurant."

"Without the slightest difficulty," said Blake, "and without transforming human nature. But you must remember that this is Socialism of the worst kind!

You would be interfering with the vested right of the publican to make a profit by creating, fostering and pandering to the vices of his fellow men! You would be interfering with the divine right of the free Englishman to get 'as drunk as a lord,' as the significant phrase goes! You would be placing a great trade in the hands of bureaucrats, and all the rest of it! Don't you see how all your theoretical objections disappear when brought to the test of any actual experiment?"

"I admit that I was rather carried away by enthusiasm," said Dr. Burton, "and that there may be objections I did not see. It might have the effect of bringing about corruption in municipal politics. Suppose one party took as its election cry a reduction in the price of drink, or the rescinding of the resolution that half-tipsy customers should not be served?"

"I don't think that you can ram this system down the throats of an unwilling people any more than you can, as experience has shown, enforce prohibition upon a people that wants to drink. I assume that there is a very general and widespread desire to stop excessive drinking. There are a great many prohibitionists in this country, but then fifty men would approve of such regulation of the trade as I propose for every one who would prohibit the sale of liquor altogether. If that be the state of public opinion, I am not afraid of the abuses you suggest. If they did take place, as of course they conceivably might, there would at least be this advantage: the abuses would ultimately be recognized as abuses by the majority of the electorate, which would have the power to enforce their opinion and rectify them."



"For my part," said Mortimer, "frankly, I don't see the least objection to that sort of Socialism, provided, of course, that you don't rob those at present in the trade."

"There we might possibly quarrel," answered Blake, "for it's clear to me that we have very different notions of robbery. But, for my part, I would give the present publicans three years' notice of the change, and allow them either to run their businesses until the end of that time, when no more licenses would be issued; or, if they chose, to hand over at once such houses as the municipality cared to take, in which case the publican might be paid a compensation for his three years' loss of profit. Again, I don't stickle for details, which you know as well as I do would be settled not by you or me, but by general public sentiment. I only suggest that a very sudden change without due warning would, in my opinion, be at once unfair and inexpedient. I wouldn't let the publican blackmail the municipality, nor let the municipality evict the publican at a moment's notice."

"Then," said Mortimer, "you talk like a reasonable being, and we could, no doubt, come to an agreement."

"Now," said Blake, "what I have said about the liquor trade is after all only an example of what could be done in numberless other cases. Taking the housing of the poor, for instance. You leave that to individual enterprise. The results we know. You say plainly to a man, 'Here's a business on which the life, habits and customs, health and sobriety, decency and morality of the population depend. Go into it and make money at it.' Now, you know that making money at it, which is

the object of the house proprietor, entails giving him a direct interest in cramming as many human beings as he can into the least and worst accommodation, and thus creating conditions under which angels would become worse than beasts. I contend that the state of the housing of the poor is the only possible outcome of this individualist system. It is no use railing at the individuals. In their place we should be no better. If I had a row of tenements on which I ought, to keep them decent, to expend a couple of hundred pounds in repairs, and wanted that money to send my wife, who was dying of consumption, to winter in Madeira, I should send my wife to Madeira, and let my tenants go to the devil. My care for my wife would not be a bad, but a good thing. What is bad is putting me in a position in which I am faced with an overwhelming temptation to prefer the interests of one person dear to me to that of hundreds of other helpless people."

"But, my dear fellow," said Mortimer, "you must know very well that there are plenty of laws, most of them, I am glad to say, passed by the Conservatives, to deal with the housing of the working classes. You surely don't mean to suggest that a State department should take the re-housing of the working classes in hand?"

"Do you know how ridiculous those laws are? About ten years ago there was one of the periodical outcries on this question. Sensations were got up by enterprising journalists; a Royal Commission appointed, and so on. The outcome of it all was a law which gave the poor man the right to bring a civil action for damages



against the landlord if he could prove that he or his family had suffered in health from the insanitary state of the dwelling at the time of his taking up his abode in it. It sounds most just, doesn't it? But anyone who knows the real condition of the parties knows that such a form of redress is a farce. The poor man doesn't know the law; if he did, he has no money to bring an action; if he had, he couldn't prove what his typhoid or his children's diphtheria was due to. Exhausted by this stupendous effort at legislation, our rulers rest satisfied, and nothing more has been heard of the matter for the last decade."

"It can't be true," said Ida.

"But it is true, Miss Burton. Your brother will tell you that he knows many people who at this moment are housed in a manner which no man would think good enough for a valuable dog, and that they are being ruined in body and mind by their material conditions."

"Yes, that's true enough," assented Dr. Burton.

"Now, I say those conditions are bad, because the whole of the motives which actuate the landlords and their agents directly prompt them to leave things as they are. I further say that you will only alter this state of things by the application of one of the two kinds of Socialism. Either you must, while leaving the property in the hands of its present owners, enforce a proper care of it by the action of the State through inspection, fines, and so on, or else you must put the housing business into the hands of the municipality."

"Ah! here I scent confiscation again," said Mortimer.

"I admit the soft impeachment," said Blake. "Confiscation of one kind or another there must be, you see. Under the present system the property owners confiscate the health, cleanliness and morality of a much larger class. Suppose that my proposal does mean that the sufferers should confiscate property so abused, and disregard the rights of property that are liable to such abuse? I am on the side of the disinherited. And so would you be too, my dear fellow, if instead of sitting in chambers in the Temple, muddling your head with musty law cases, you would go and look for yourself at the facts of society round you. Don't deal with these things at second hand. Don't push away all consideration of them, but enquire for yourself. Then I'll stake my existence that if you don't come round to my way of thinking as far as theories are concerned, you would vote the same way as I should on any practical proposition to interfere with the sacred rights of property."

## CHAPTER XVI.

WHEN the three friends assembled for the last time in Dr. Burton's smoking-room, Ida said that she was not half done with the questions which she had to ask. But Blake insisted that their meetings must now end.

"I have tried," he said, "only to give you some general ideas about the matter, and to remove the prejudices and misconceptions which prevent people



caring to make any study of the subject. If you have followed what I have said you should now be in a position to prosecute the subject for yourselves. You should not, at any rate, find your energies paralysed at the outset by the conviction that the whole thing is an absurd paradox or a wild nightmare. I can do no more for you. You must do the rest yourselves."

"But I want some advice from you, Mr. Blake," said Ida. "I want to know what to do, and how to set to work."

"There I can very easily help you. If you really want to get to know anything worth knowing, don't read, or at any rate, read very little. Go and see for yourself what the facts of life are, and see if my theories fit them. If they do not, I most earnestly beg of you to throw over the theories, not the facts. I believe the theories to be true myself, because my experience tells that they afford the most satisfactory explanation of the facts that are to be found."

"There is one very serious fact, at least," said Dr. Burton, "which you have not directly explained—the constantly recurring periods of industrial depression, about which nobody seems able to explain anything except that they recur with increasing frequency and intensified severity."

"Yet the explanation is, after all, excessively simple," replied Blake, "You have a period of good trade, as, for instance, from 1888 to 1891. Well, what happens? Prices are high and profits are good, there is a brisk demand, and manufacturers and merchants can manage fairly satisfactorily to achieve the one object for which they are in business, viz., to make money. Now, take

any trade and see what results—what must result—when industry is being regulated, or rather not regulated, by anything but the pursuit of wealth on the part of those who have the means for producing it. Let us suppose the boot trade is in a flourishing condition. Prices are good, and the more pairs of boots a manufacturer can make the quicker will he accumulate a fortune. He naturally sets all his productive forces at work. He crams his factory full of hands. He works his men overtime. He borrows money and increases his plant. He lays in large stocks of material, lest their price should go up owing to the improvement in the trade. In fact, with a lively remembrance of the period of depression he has just gone through, he strains every nerve to 'make hay while the sun shines.' But it is not he alone who is doing this. Every other manufacturer in the trade is busy in the same way. There is money to be made in the business, and fresh men start in it. The ingenious turn their businesses into limited companies, and attract fresh capital. The result of all this can easily be foreseen. It is inevitable, and springs quite naturally from the conditions we all recognize. The means of production are enormously powerful. I should not like to hazard a guess as to the number of millions of pairs of boots that could be turned out by the trade when work is in full swing, but it is quite certain that the number would be far in excess of any possible effective demand by the population. This over-supply produces results quite inevitable and perfectly intelligible. The demand, however brisk it may have been, is satisfied—is glutted—stops. Boots become unsaleable even at cost price,



for the stocks of bankrupts, who have made the worst miscalculations, flood the market. Wages are reduced and hands dismissed, a fact which in itself again reduces the demand for boots. Now multiply our single instance of the boot trade by all the trades in existence; reflect that there is floating in society a stupendous amount of capital, energy and labour ready to throw themselves with frenzied haste into any business that promises the least success; and you will have no difficulty in understanding that industrial crises must recur in a society whose productive powers are enormous, and are totally unregulated by any regard for the necessities of that society."

"Humph!" said Dr. Burton, "that does seem clear enough. Then you regard these terrific oscillations of trade as being a permanent feature in modern industry?"

"They are necessary concomitants of capitalistic industry, but it is evident that they could be obviated by proportioning means to ends."

"That means State interference again!" exclaimed Mortimer. "As if the State could know more about the conditions of the boot trade than the employers who have been engaged in it all their lives!"

"Let us see, now," said Blake. "Do you say it is beyond the reach of human ingenuity to arrive at the knowledge which would stop this sort of thing? Is it impossible to ascertain with some approach to accuracy how many pairs of boots the population will require during the next six months? Such things are done every day. In the Army, for instance, the number of

pairs of ammunition boots annually required are estimated quite closely enough for practical purposes. What can be done for 100,000 men can be done for 40,000,000 men, women and children."

"Very well," said Mortimer, grudgingly, "I admit that some sort of rough estimate might be made."

"The less rough the better," said Blake. "But any estimate, however faulty, must be better than wild and unregulated guesses. Then I suppose you'll grant that it is equally possible to estimate the boot-producing power of the trade as at present equipped? Very well. You can't mean to tell me that it is impossible to bring demand and supply into something like the right proportions. And that's the whole story."

"But I don't want to have two pairs of Government boots a year served out to me, as Tommy Atkins has," objected Mortimer.

"But there must be a happy mean between that sort of iron regulation of supply and the present chaotic anarchy, and that happy mean should be the aim. Personally I can bear with equanimity the notion of your having but a limited supply of ready-made boots, should it come to that, if I know that the slight inconvenience to you will save some of your fellow countrymen the horrors of these terrible fluctuations in employment. In fact, if I might venture to give you some of the advice Miss Burton asked for, I should suggest that you will find it easier to understand these questions if you could bring yourself for a moment to abandon the purely egotistical standpoint and take the patriotic one."



"You see, Mr. Mortimer," said Ida, "it may be the duty of a patriot not only to die for his country, but to wear ill-fitting boots for it."

"Chaffing apart," said Blake, "I am quite serious when I say that the richer class must learn that the sacrifice of what they consider harmless luxuries is just as much the duty of a citizen as incurring danger and privation in a battle-field. If there was another Crimean War, Mr. Mortimer would be only too anxious to go and wear brown paper boots in the trenches and live on horse-flesh, on behalf of his country. I have seen the English gentleman campaigning, and am ready to bear my witness that he stands its hardships with perfect cheerfulness. If you could only get them to understand that every English winter in times of peace is just a repetition of the horrors of Sebastopol and Scutari! The great mass of your countrymen, sir, are engaged in a daily struggle for life and all that makes life dear, against want and pestilence, famine and oppression. The day will surely come when you and your like, who stand idly by and watch it with a sneer, and think me and my like confounded fools for volunteering in that campaign, will be regarded with the same feelings that you would now have for a man who in his country's hour of danger would deliberately prefer to stop at home in his club with his bottle of claret and his patent-leather boots."

"Upon my soul, my dear fellow," said Mortimer, "I never looked at these things in this light before."

"I know that perfectly well, and I know that it's not altogether your fault. At least it was not, until you had an opportunity of hearing me talk about it. It is my

good fortune to be able to speak to you in language you can understand. But, now that you do understand, you know as well as I do that there are no words to express your baseness if you shirk your share in the conflict."

"But, Mr. Blake, what are we to do? What can we do?" asked Ida.

"I am in a better position than most preachers, at any rate," answered Blake, "for I can tell you to do not what I preach, but what I practise. You can each of you throw all your influence and energy on the side—I was going to say of the working classes, but I don't quite mean that, for you would often find yourselves in apparent opposition to them—on the side of truth in these matters. And to get at the truth you must go to the fountain head. You must get out of the club and the study and the drawing-room, where, after all, you are as far removed from the realities of the present as if you were in the mummy-cases of the British Museum. You must get your hearts and your heads and your arms and your legs free of the mummy-cloths that wrap you round so tightly that you can't act, or see, or hear, or even feel. Then you'll find plenty of scope for the exercise of any faculties you may have got. Go out and see for yourselves, and I haven't any fears for the result. Then, if you like, come back, for after all there is very little that you can do for the people that are not of your own class, and tell the people in the clubs and drawing-rooms what you have seen, and get them to do the same. What has to be done after all is to alter opinion upon these matters, as fast as possible. And every one of you can help to do that."



"But is that all one can do?" asked Ida. "Isn't there any practical work to which one could devote oneself?"

"Plenty of it, but you'll find it for yourself if you go out and look for it. But it's a very thankless task, and a very hard one. Besides, many people have closer claims upon them that they cannot disregard. But influencing public opinion is possible to every one without going an inch out of his way."

"That may be very well for you, Mr. Blake," said Mortimer. "You've got the knowledge and the enthusiasm, and the force of character."

"Do you mean that you haven't?" said Blake, laughing. "Isn't that rather a pitiable confession? All that you want is the knowledge. If you would go and see the things that I've seen, and live in constant contact with them, I don't think from what I can judge of your temperament that you would be lacking in zeal or pugnacity. And as for force of character, that can be increased at will by practice, just like force of muscle."

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Mortimer.

"I mean, if you'll allow me to put it frankly, that you've probably let your character be moulded by circumstances instead of trying your hand at moulding circumstances yourself. You have conformed, and conformity is the death of your natural force. If you will come out from the shelter of other men's opinions, of accepted traditions and of customary beliefs, and try to form your own opinions, you'll find that these will grow strong enough to enable you to hold your own.

There never was man yet who could convince others till he had convinced himself."

"And you are convinced yourself?" Mortimer asked.

"I am sure as a man can be of anything that what I have been trying to explain to you people these last few weeks contains the root of the matter, and I know that the ideas I have expressed will at no very distant date be accepted as the basis of society. What is the alternative?"

"Well," said Mortimer, "I suppose that it is possible to conceive that there may be a change and growth without such a reverse of the wheel as would bring the working class on top, and subvert all our ideas to suit their notions and agree with their interests?"

"It may be theoretically conceivable," replied Blake, "but you know very well that there's not the least chance of it. As to the subversion of our ideas, it seems to me that all these changes in their ideal stage have already been accepted. It is where the practical application of them goes against, not our reasons, but our prejudices and interests, that the opposition to them appears. You will see what I mean if you will think for a moment what is the tendency of all the books that people read."

"Do you mean fiction?" asked Ida. "Most people read nothing but that."

"Yes. Fiction represents, not society as it is, but society as most people would like it to be. Take the subject in which you yourself are particularly interested. In the stories you find characters actuated by noble and generous impulses. Anybody who judged our



civilization from the characters in current fiction would imagine that mercenary marriages, class pride, the worship of convenience and convention, the contempt for honest labour, the greed for wealth got at the cost of any suffering on the part of others, were things which, in the rare cases in which they appeared in real life, met with universal reprobation. All young persons sympathise with the heroes and heroines of fiction. They would like to live like them and be like them. But after some real experience of the world they find that under the actual circumstances our institutions make that sort of behaviour too painful to be borne."

"Then you mean to say," said Mortimer, "that you suppose people would like in real life to carry out the high-falutin notions they read about?"

"I mean that those high-falutin notions represent the instinctive wishes of the readers much better than the conventions that obtain the mastery in their daily life. The novelist writes what people are thinking, and the thoughts of one generation become realizable in action in the next. The fact is that our every-day actions are against our natures, and we feel this very strongly, especially when we are young and have not suffered from 'the contagion of the world's slow stain.' You won't alter our natures, but you can alter the conventions and institutions which warp and distort them."

"One notices," said Dr. Burton, "that the more peaceful and humdrum our life becomes the more popular are stories of adventure and bloodshed, and that not only with boys at the age when every one if

asked to choose a profession would unhesitatingly declare for that of a pirate, but with grown-up men too."

"That comes from the same sort of thing," said Blake. "The utter absence of excitement and adventure in their lives sends them to fiction to supply the want. The late laureate was a most popular writer, and one of his most popular poems was *Ulysses*, but could anything be remoter from the daily experience of those who mouth its lines?"

"That only means," said Mortimer, "that we all want to be better and greater than we are."

"Than we are allowed to be, you mean. It is the pressure of outward circumstance, as well as our own weakness of will, that stops us. I suppose we'll all admit, cynic and doctor alike, that happy human love is one of the best things in the world, and that most young people have a very vivid notion of its desirability. Can you tell me why it is that they so seldom get it? Surely not because they don't want it, but that their circumstances make it unnecessarily difficult of attainment."

"And you think that in the same way," said Ida, "the longing for all the noble possibilities of Socialism is present in all of us who are not jaded and worn out."

"I am sure of it. You will find the young everywhere siding with the new order, and they do it not from want of experience, but because their perceptions have not been dulled and their desires cramped. The creed of middle age has no chance against that of youth in affecting the future."



"Then," said Ida, "we must work and wait to bring about these things in a future which is distant, and may be hastened ever so little by our efforts?"

"Yes," answered Blake, "we must work and hope, remembering always that we are only at the beginning of the period of man's real development, and be content if we can see that the utmost that we can achieve contains nothing more than a promise of that brighter future. As certain also of your own poets have said, we must be satisfied

"To trace love's faint beginnings in mankind,  
 To know even hate is but a mask of love's,  
 To see a good in evil, and a hope  
 In ill success; to sympathise, be proud  
 Of their half reasons, faint aspirings, dim  
 Struggles for truth, their poorest fallacies,  
 Their prejudices and fears and cares and doubts;  
 All with a touch of nobleness, despite  
 Their error, upward tending all though weak,  
 Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,  
 But dream of him, and guess where he may be,  
 And do their best to climb and get to him."

