



"HAVE YOU NOT HEARD HOW IT HAS GONE WITH MANY A CAUSE BEFORE NOW: FIRST, FEW MEN HEED IT; NEXT, MOST MEN CONTEMN IT; LASTLY, ALL MEN ACCEPT IT—AND THE CAUSE IS WON!"

Communications are invited from all concerned with social questions. They should be written on one side of the paper only and should be addressed to the Editors of the COMMONWEAL, 13 Farringdon Road, E.C. They must be accompanied by the name and address of the writer, not necessarily for publication.

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TO CORRESPONDENTS.

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QUESTIONS bearing upon the principles propounded and the objects had in view by the *Commonweal*, will be welcomed by the Editors.

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D. C.—Any one having friends in Ireland should send them copies of leaflet, "Shall Ireland be Free?" None at any time should neglect this most effective form of propaganda.

RECEIVED—*England*: Anarchist—Worker's Friend—Daylight (Norwich)—Christian Socialist—Church Reformer—National Review—Republican—Journal of Vigilance Association—Justice—To-Day—Freethinker—Practical Socialist—Leicester Co-operative Record—Imperial Federation—Our Corner—The Socialist. *Belgium*: Le Chante-Clair (Bruxelles). *Canada*: L'Union Ouvrière (Montreal). *France*: Paris: Cri du Peuple (daily)—La Revue Socialiste—Le Révolté—Le Socialiste—La Tribune des Peuples—Revue du Mouvement Social—La Citoyenne. Le Devoir (Guise)—Le Forçat du Travail (Bordeaux). *Germany*: Neue Zeit (Stuttgart). *Holland*: Recht voor Allen. *Hungary*: Arbeiter-Wochen-Chronik (Buda-Pest). *India*: People's Friend (Madras). *Italy*: Il Fascio Operaio (Milan). *New Zealand*: Watchman. *Portugal*: O Campino—Voz do Operario—O Protesto Operario (Lisbon). *Spain*: El Angel del Hogar—Revista Social—Acracia—La Justicia Humana (Barcelona)—Bandera Social—El Socialista (Madrid)—El Socialismo (Cadiz)—La Perseverancia (Huelva). *Switzerland*: Sozial Demokrat (Zürich). *U. S. A.*: (New York): Volkszeitung—Der Sozialist—Freiheit—Progress—John Swinton's Paper—Spread the Light—Our Country—Amerikanische Arbeiterzeitung—Truthseeker. (Boston): Liberty—Woman's Journal. Denver (Col.) Labor Inquirer—Little Socialist—Chicago (Ill.) Alarm—Detroit (Mich.) Labor Leaf—Princeton (Mass.) Word—Cleveland (O.) Carpenter. Cincinnati (O.) Unionist—San Francisco (Cal.) Truth—Stockton (Cal.) Mail—Petersburg (Ill.) Voice of Labor—New Haven (Conn.) Workmen's Advocate—St. Louis (Mo.) Altruist. Kansas (Mo.) Sun—Pittsburg (Pa.) Labor Herald—Baltimore (Md.) Labor Free Press—Valley Falls (Kan.) Lucifer—Newfoundland (Pa.) La Torpille—Litchfield (Minn.) Radical—Evansville (Ind.) Neue Zeit Milwaukee (Wis.) Volksblatt—Portland (Oregon) Alarm—Salem (Oregon) Advance—Thought—Paterson (N. J.) Labor Standard.

ARTICLES RECEIVED.—Will appear: "Malthusianism"—"A Word in Time"—"Some Instructive Facts"—"The Voice of Freedom"—"Co-operation and Competition."

SOCIALISM FROM THE ROOT UP.

CHAPTER VI.—PREPARATIONS FOR REVOLUTION—FRANCE.

As we have said, Louis XIV. succeeded in making the French monarchy a pure autocratic bureaucracy, completely centralised in the person of the monarch. This with an ambitious king like Louis XIV. involved constant war, for he felt himself bound to satisfy his ideal of the necessary expansion of the territory and influence of France, which he looked upon as the absolute property of the king. The general success of Louis XIV. brought with it the success of these wars of aggrandisement, and France became very powerful under his rule. Under the rule of his minister Colbert industrialism in France became completely commercialised. Colbert spared no pains or energy in bringing this about. Often, with more or less success, he drove an industry forward artificially, as with the silk and woollen manufactures. For he was eager to win for France a foremost place in the world-market, which he thought but the due accompaniment of her monarchical glory; and he knew that without it that glory would have died of starvation, since the taxes would not have yielded the necessary food.

It is true that even in England growing commercialism was subordinate to constitutionalism, the English form of bureaucracy; but the idea was already afoot there that the former was rather an end than a means, whereas in France commercialism was completely subordinated to the glory of the autocratic monarchy—a mere feeder of it.

The religion of this period of the "Grand Monarque" shows little more than an ecclesiastical struggle between Gallicanism on the one hand, which claimed a feeble spark of independence as regards Rome for the French Church, and is represented by Fénelon and Bossuet, and Jesuitry on the other hand, which was the exponent of Roman centralisation. The leading intelligence of the time was on the Gallican side; but the king in the long run favoured the Jesuits, as being the readier instruments of his bureaucratic rule. Outside this ecclesiastical quarrel there was no life whatever in religion, except what was shown by the existence of a few erratic sects of mystics, confined to cultivated persons like the Quietists and Jansenists. The former of these may be said to have put forward the complete abnegation of humanity in the presence of God, while the latter attempted a revivification of the pietism of the Catholic Church.

The Regency which succeeded to the reign of Louis XIV. saw the definite beginnings of the last corruption which betokened the Revolution. The wars of aggrandisement still went on but were now generally unsuccessful; the industrialism set a-going by Colbert went on steadily, but the profits to be gained by it did not satisfy the more adventurous spirit of the period, and the Regency saw a curious exposition of stock-jobbery before its time in the form of the Mississippi scheme of Law, which had its counterpart in England in the South-Sea Bubble. It was a financing operation—an attempt to get something out of nothing—founded on the mercantile theory of economy then current, which showed but an imperfect knowledge of the industrial revolution beginning under men's very eyes, and assumed that the wealth of a country consists in the amount of the precious metals which it can retain. This assumption, by the way, is curiously exemplified in the half-commercial half-buccaneering romances of Daniel Defoe, whose works we should have mentioned in our last chapter as a relief to the monotony of dulness of eighteenth century literature in England.

It is necessary to say something about the literature and art of this period that goes before the Revolution in France, because that country is the especial exponent, particularly in art, of the degradation which indicated the rottenness of society. As in England, literature was formal and stilted, and produced little except worthlessly clever essays and still more worthless verses that have no claim to be called poetry. The French verse-makers, however, aimed at something higher than the English, and produced works which depend on pomp and style for any claim to attention they may have, and for the rest are unreal and lifeless. Amidst them all one name stands forward as representing some reality—Molière, to wit. But the life and genuineness of his comedies serve to show the corruption of the times as clearly as the dead classicalism of Racine; for this, the one man of genius of the time, was driven into the expression of mere cynicism; though in one remarkable passage of his works he shows a sympathy for the ballad-poetry of the people, which, when noticed at all in England at the same period, and even much later, received a kind of indulgent patronage rather than admiration. At the same time as there was a sham tragedy current at this time, so also there was a sham love of simplicity. The ladies and gentlemen of the period ignored the real peasants who were the miserable slaves of the French landlords, and invented in their dramas, poems, and pictures sham shepherds and peasants, who were bundles of conscious unreality, inane imitations of the later classics. This literature and art would be indeed too contemptible for mention, if it were not a sign of a society rotting into revolution.

The fine arts, which had in the end of the sixteenth century descended from the expression of the people's faith and aspirations into that of the fancy, ingenuity, and whim of gifted individuals, fell lower still. They lost every atom of beauty and dignity, and retained little even of the ingenuity of the earlier Renaissance, and became mere expensive and pretentious though carefully finished upholstery, mere adjuncts of pomp and state, the expression of the insolence of riches and the complacency of respectability. Once again it must be said of the art as of the general literature of the period, that no reasonable man could even bestow a passing glance at them but for the incurable corruption of Society which they betokened.

So the time wore away through the disgraceful years of the Regency and of Louis XV., till the accession of the once Dauphin, now Louis XVI., to the throne, which was hailed as a new era by the respectability of France; and was, indeed, the inauguration of a new era undreamed of by the actors in it. Of the conscious hopes and aims which came to the surface with this change, there were indications in the opposition of the higher bourgeoisie to the whimsical and scandalous courtesan-Absolutism, the rule of the Pompadours and Dubarrys, which was predominant under Louis XV., this opposition took the form, amongst others, of the assertion of the formal legal rights of Parliament so-called, which in France was but a privileged body of lawyers, representative of nothing but the crystallisation of the abuses of a sham feudality, but which, nevertheless, both under Louis XV. and his successor, found itself put forward as a champion of the respectability of Bourgeoisdom against the rampant corruption of the Court. But on the accession of Louis XVI. this tendency of respectability to assert itself received fresh impulse, and took a more definite form, and became almost a party in the country, though it had no chance of exercising any direct influence on the government, which was a mere mass of abuses. This respectable reforming party, although for the most part outwardly orthodox, amongst themselves professed

materialism and the worship of reason, and was inspired by a bourgeois humanitarianism which was its most genuine side, and which was largely fed, if not created, by the writings of Voltaire, and still more of Jean Jacques Rousseau and Diderot. This party was a most important element amidst the causes of the revolution; it rallied to it all who had any pretence to cultivated progress, and though it meant nothing but intelligent Conservatism, it formed a screen as it were behind which the true revolutionary forces could gather for the attack on privilege. Its formation was the last sign of the approaching end of the absolutist bureaucracy which was, so to say, propped up by the bodies of its former enemies which it had triumphed over, the feudal rights of the older nobility. That great French centralised monarchy had been a long time ripening, but once ripe it decayed very speedily, and no wonder since it was the corruption of a corruption.

Here, then, we have in France a contrast to the state of things in England. No constitutionalism here; an absolutism despised even by the privileged classes; unable to move in the direction of progress, even when, as in the case of Louis XVI., its head has a tendency to the intelligent conservatism above mentioned; bankrupt also amidst a people broken down, and a commerce hampered by the exactions of the hereditary privilege which is its sole support, discredited by unsuccessful wars, so that the door is shut to its ambition in that road; at home it has to face uneasily the new abstract ideas of liberty and the rights of men. These ideas are professed, indeed, by those who have an interest in preserving the present state of things, but are listened to and pondered by people who find that state of things unbearable. In short, while England, at peace at home and prosperous under reasonable conservatism, is forced to be seeking colonies and markets abroad, while within her own bounds industrialism is quietly developing toward the great change, France, driven back on herself, is forced face to face with the elements of violent change at home; on the one hand bankruptcy and deadlock, on the other intellectual activity directed wholly towards theories of material well-being of a well-to-do class. And at the back of all a commercial bourgeoisie oppressed by privilege, and a miserable proletariat of mere starvelings. From such elements political revolution *must* be born.

E. BELFORT BAX AND WILLIAM MORRIS.

(To be continued.)

RUSKIN AS A REVOLUTIONARY PREACHER.

II.

IN the columns which from time to time may appear under the above heading, I propose to give, with the smallest possible of connecting thread, such passages as shall, to use one of his book-titles, be veritable "arrows of the chace."

I do not propose much in the way of criticism; if I were doing this I should take exception to much of Ruskin's writing. The authority of a great name is potent with so many of the bourgeois, that we must use great names if they help us to attack great abuses. While I adopt Ruskin's political economy, I totally disregard his superstitions and supernaturalisms. His great regard for lawyers and soldiers seems to me utterly evil.

I shall give exact references, but shall abbreviate titles after the first citation.

That Ruskin has been regarded as dangerous enough in his teachings to be boycotted out of two important magazines is not known to every reader. 'Unto This Last,' the first rough draft of his political economy, was commenced in *Cornhill* in 1860. The storm raised was so fierce that the editor had to shut down on the articles. After a little space of time the editor of *Fraser's Magazine* invited some contributions on same lines, and Ruskin during 1862-3 wrote in that journal—somewhat tamer, by the way; but now the publisher put on the veto, and again Ruskin's political economy was out in the cold. 'Munera Pulveris' is the book-form of this second series. The ideas of those two books have been touched upon and filled out in almost every book of his since. What could have raised such a storm? Much exception cannot be aken to the following:

"Primarily, which is very notable and curious, I observe that men of business rarely know the meaning of the word 'rich.' At least, if they know, they do not in their reasonings allow for the fact that it is a relative word, implying its opposite, 'poor,' as positively as the word 'north' implies its opposite, 'south.' Men nearly always speak and write as if riches were absolute, and it were possible, by following certain scientific precepts, for everybody to be rich; whereas riches are a power like that of electricity, acting only through inequalities or negations of itself. The force of the guinea you have in your pocket depends wholly on the default of a guinea in your neighbour's pocket. If he did not want it, it would be of no use to you; the degree of power it possesses depends accurately upon the need or desire he has for it; and the art of making yourself rich, in the ordinary mercantile economist's sense, is therefore equally and necessarily the art of keeping your neighbour poor." ('Unto This Last,' 2nd ed., 1877, p. 40.)

There seems in this passage something which the worshippers of the great god "Thrift" would, if cornered, have some difficulty in getting over. He next suggests that a distinction should be made between the two economies, "political" and "mercantile."

"Political economy (the economy of a State or of citizens), consists simply in the production, preservation, and distribution, at fittest time and place, of useful or pleasurable things." (P. 41.)

"At fittest time and place" cuts at our present production-wholly-for-profit system.

"But mercantile economy . . . signifies the accumulation, in the hands of individuals, of legal or moral claims upon, or power over, the labour of others, every such claim implying precisely as much poverty or debt on one side as it implies riches or right on the other." (P. 42.)

E. B. Bax seems to think that Ruskin in the region of economics fails to see things as they are (see *Commonweal*, 15th May, p. 50). I suppose we all think that any authority we appeal to makes more for our particular view than any other; but I am sure no Socialist need wish any stronger argument for his position than Essay II. of the work I am now quoting. "The real gist of these papers, their central meaning and aim, is to give, as I believe for the first time in English, . . . a logical definition of 'Wealth'" (Preface, xi.). He goes on then to deride the claims of any book which proposes—as he says Mill's 'Principles of Political Economy' does—to treat of any science without definition. This he asserts—and returns again and again to the charge—has *always* been the method of the economists; and in this, I take it, most of us agree.

To return to Essay II., entitled "Veins of Wealth":

"It [mercantile economy] does not, therefore, necessarily involve an addition to the actual property or well-being of the State in which it exists. But since this commercial wealth or power over labour"—[Here is the supreme point of all]—"is nearly always convertible at once into real property, while real property is not always convertible at once into power over labour, the idea of riches among active men in civilised nations generally refers to commercial wealth; and in estimating their possessions they rather calculate the value of their horses and their fields by the number of guineas they could get for them, than the value of their guineas by the number of horses and fields they could buy with them." (P. 42.)

To most of us, I take it, it seems clear that so-called riches of so-called rich people do not add to the well-being of the State. The last part goes to show what an "unscience" political economy must be when the values of one side of the balance are not the equivalent of the other.

"There is, however, another reason for this habit of mind; namely, that an accumulation of real property is of little use to its owner unless, together with it, he has commercial power over labour. Thus, suppose any person to be put in possession of a large estate of fruitful land, with rich beds of gold in its gravel, countless herds of cattle in its pastures, houses and gardens and storehouses full of useful stores; but suppose, after all, that he could get no servants! In order that he may be able to have servants, some one in his neighbourhood must be poor and in want of his gold, or his corn. Assume that no one is in want of either, and that no servants are to be had. He must, therefore, bake his own bread, make his own clothes, plough his own ground, and shepherd his own flocks. His gold will be as useful to him as any other yellow pebbles on his estate. His stores must rot, for he cannot consume them. He can eat no more than another man could eat, and wear no more than another man could wear. He must lead a life of severe and common labour to procure even ordinary comforts; he will be ultimately unable to keep either houses in repair or fields in cultivation, and forced to content himself with a poor man's portion of cottage and garden, in the midst of a desert of waste land trampled by wild cattle and encumbered by ruins of palaces, which he will hardly mock at himself by calling his 'own.' The most covetous of mankind would, with small exultation, I presume, accept riches of this kind on these terms. What is really desired, under the name of riches, is essentially power over men; in its simplest sense, the power of obtaining for our own advantage the labour of servant, tradesman, and artist." (Pp. 43, 44.)

. . . "So that, as above stated, the art of becoming 'rich,' in the common sense, is not absolutely nor finally the art of accumulating much money for ourselves, but also of contriving that our neighbour shall have less. In accurate terms, it is 'the art of establishing the maximum inequality in our own favour.'" (Pp. 45, 46.)

. . . "Thus the circulation of wealth in a nation resembles that of the blood in the natural body. . . . There is a flush of the body which is full of warmth and life, and another which will pass into putrefaction. The analogy will hold good down even to minute particulars; for as diseased local determination of the blood involves depression of the general health of the system, all morbid local action of riches will be found ultimately to involve a weakening of the resources of the body politic." (Pp. 48, 49.)

Will any care to contest this? What is our "Trade Depression" but in reality a determination of blood—capital—to the (punningly) capita (list), the head?

Consequent is the death, want of blood at the other parts of the body. A death, however, not so much from want of the capital itself as by the power which the capitalist has over labour by prohibiting productiveness:

"Any given accumulation of commercial wealth may be indicative, on the one hand, of faithful industries, progressive energies, and productive ingenuities; or, on the other, it may be indicative of mortal luxury, merciless tyranny, ruinous chicane" (p. 58). . . . "One mass of money is the outcome of action which has created—another, of action which has annihilated—ten times as much in the gathering of it; such and such strong hands have been paralysed, as if they had been numbed by nightshade; so many strong men's courage broken, so many productive operations hindered. . . . That which seems to be wealth may in verity be only the index of far-reaching ruin." (P. 59.)

Even the bourgeois political economists are beginning to allow much of the above, that "wealth" and "health" do not have the exact relationship they should have:

"Since the essence of wealth consists in its authority over men, if the apparent or nominal wealth fail in this power, it fails in essence; in fact, ceases to be wealth. It does not appear lately in England, that our authority over men is absolute. The servants show a disposition to rush riotously upstairs, under an impression that their wages are not regularly paid. We should augur ill of any gentleman's property to whom this happened every other day in his drawing-room. So also the power of our wealth seems limited as respects the comfort of the servants, no less than their quietude. The persons in the kitchen appear to be ill-dressed, squalid, half-starved. One cannot help imagining that the riches of the establishment must be of a very theoretical and documentary character." (Pp. 63, 64.)