

SOCIALISM FROM THE ROOT UP.

CHAPTER II.—MEDIÆVAL SOCIETY.

WE have now to deal with that Mediæval Society which was based on the fusion of ideas of tribal communism and Roman individualism and bureaucracy. The fullest, and one may say the most pedantic type of this society is to be found in the Mediæval German Empire; it was modified somewhat in other countries; in France by the fact that several of the other potentates, as, e.g., the Duke of Burgundy, were theoretically independent of the King, and practically were often at least as powerful. In England, on the contrary, the monarchy soon gained complete predominance over the great barons, and a kind of bureaucracy soon sprang up which interfered with the full working of the feudal system.

The theory of this feudal system is the existence of an unbroken chain of service from the serf up to the emperor, and of protection from the emperor down to the serf; it recognises no absolute ownership of land; God is the one owner of the earth, the emperor and his kings are his vice-gerents there, who may devolve their authority to their feudal vassals, and they in turn to theirs, and so on till it reaches the serf, the proletarian, on whom all this hierarchy lives, and who has no rights as regard his own lord except protection from others outside the manor that he lives and works on; to him his personal lord was the incarnation of the compulsion and protection of God, which all men acknowledged and looked for.

It is quite clear that this system was mixed up with religious ideas of some sort; accordingly, we find that the Middle Ages had a distinct religion of their own, developed from that early Christianity which was one of the forces that broke up the Roman Empire. As long as that Empire lasted in its integrity, Christianity was purely individualistic; it bade every man do his best for his future in another world, and had no commands to give about the government of this world except to obey "the powers that be" in non-religious matters, in order to escape troubles and complications which might distract his attention from the kingdom of God.

But in Mediæval Christianity, although this idea of individual devotion to the perfection of the next world still existed, it was kept in the background, and was almost dormant in the presence of the idea of the *Church*, which was not merely a link between the earthly and the heavenly kingdoms, but even may be said to have brought the kingdom of heaven to earth by breathing its spirit into the temporal power, which it recognised as another manifestation of its own authority. Therefore, the struggles of the Temporal and Spiritual Powers, which form so large a part of the history of the Middle Ages, were not the result of antagonism of ideas between the two, but came of the tendency of one side of the great organisation of Society to absorb the other without rejecting its theory; in short, on the one hand the Church was political and social rather than religious, while on the other the State was at least as much religious as it was political and social.

Such, then, was the theory of Mediæval Society; but apart from whatever of oppression on life and thought was inherent in it, the practice of the theory was liable to many abuses, to which the obvious confusion and misery of the times are mostly referable. These abuses again were met by a protest in the form of almost constant rebellion against Society, of which one may take as examples the organised vagabondage of Middle Europe, the Jacquerie in France, and in England what may be called the chronic rebellion of the Foresters, which produced such an impression on the minds of the people, that it has given birth to the ballad epic known by the name of its mythical hero, Robin Hood. Resistance to authority and contempt of the "Rights of Property" are the leading ideas in this rough but noble poetry.

Besides these irregular protests against the oppression of the epoch, there was another factor at work in its modification—the Gilds, which forced themselves into the system, and were accepted as a regular part of it.

The ideas which went with the survivals of the primitive communism of the tribes were, on the one hand, absorbed into the feudal system and formed part of it, but on the other, they developed associations for mutual protection and help, which at first were merely a kind of benefit societies according to the ideas of the times. These were followed by associations for the protection of trade, which were called the gilds-merchant. From these the development was two-fold: they were partly transformed into the corporations of the free towns, which had already begun to be founded from other developments, and partly into the craft-gilds, or organisations for the protection and regulation of handicrafts—which latter were the result of a radical reform of the gilds-merchant, accomplished not without a severe struggle, often accompanied by actual and very bitter war. The last remains of these craft-gilds are traceable in the names of the city companies of London.

It should be noted that this tendency to association was bitterly opposed in its earlier days by the potentates of both Church and State, especially in those countries which had been more under the influence of the Roman empire. But in the long-run it could not be resisted, and at last both the gilds and the free towns which their emancipated labour had created or developed were favoured (as well as fleeced) by the bureaucratic kings as a make-weight to the powerful nobles and the Church.

The condition of one part of mediaeval life industrial was thus quite altered. In the earlier Middle Ages the serf not only did all the field-work, but also most of the handicrafts, which now fell entirely into the

hands of the gilds. It must be noted also that in their best days there were no mere journeymen in these crafts; a workshop was manned simply by the workman and his apprentices, who would, when their time was out, become members of the gild like himself: mastership, in our sense of the word, was unknown.

By about the year 1350 the craft-gilds were fully developed and triumphant; and that date may conveniently be accepted as the end of the first part of the Middle Ages.

By this time serfdom generally was beginning to yield to the change introduced by the gilds and free towns: the field serfs partly drifted into the towns and became affiliated to the gilds, and partly became free men, though living on lands whose tenure was unfree—copyholders, we should call them. This movement towards the break-up of serfdom is marked by the peasant's war in England led by Wat Tyler and John Ball in Kent, and John Litster (dyer) in East Anglia, which was the answer of the combined yeomen, emancipated and unemancipated serfs, to the attempt of the nobles to check the movement.

But the development of the craft-gilds and the flocking in of the freed serfs into the towns laid the foundations for another change in industrialism: with the second part of the mediæval period appears the journeyman, or so-called free labourer. Besides the craftsman and his apprentices, the workshop now has these "free labourers" in it—unprivileged workmen, that is, who were nevertheless under the domination of the gild, and compelled to affiliation with it. The gildsmen now began to be privileged workmen; and with them began the foundation of the present middle-class, whose development from this source went on to meet its other development on the side of trade which was now becoming noticeable. In 1453 Constantinople was taken by the Turks; the art of printing was spreading; Greek manuscripts were being discovered and read; a thirst for new or revived learning, outside the superstitions of the mediæval Church and the quaint, curiously perverted and half-understood remains of popular traditions, was arising, and all was getting ready for the transformation of mediæval into modern or commercial society.

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(To be continued.)

TRADE DEPRESSION.

THE Cobden Club is not exactly the sort of body that one would expect to find publishing arguments that simply reduce our industrial system to an absurdity. Such, however, is the case, as we shall very soon show.

In a tract on Trade Depression, written by Augustus Mongredien, and lately published by the said Club, we have an array of facts and figures that, if they mean anything at all, mean that blessings are calamities, that abundance is an ill, that there is nothing like scarcity to make trade good. We will just give a brief summary of Mr Mongredien's arguments, and then draw a conclusion or two of our own.

During the four years previous to 1884, Mr Mongredien tells us, our imports and exports together averaged £710,293,000; in 1884 they suddenly sank to £685,147,000, making our foreign trade in 1884 £25,146,000 smaller than the average of the four previous years, and £45,894,000 smaller than it was in 1883. The cause of this contraction was the very good harvest of 1884, which exceeded the average harvest of the previous years by 15½ million pounds sterling. The result of this was that we required to import 15½ million pounds worth of grain less in 1884, and consequently we had to export a proportionally less quantity of other goods. Thus, then, through having so good a harvest in 1884, our foreign trade contracted directly to the extent of 30 millions sterling. It really contracted more, as Mr Mongredien shows from the Board of Trade returns: the figures we have given, however, are sufficient to show the gist of his argument, and that is all we are concerned with here.

Mr Mongredien's position is further borne out by a reference to the trades that have suffered most severely during the present depression. It is apparent that a diminution in our foreign trade would affect shipping in a very direct manner, for there is so much less to carry to and fro. Ship-builders would also be affected, dock-labourers, and those industries connected with shipping. Now a reference to the facts shows that these are just the industries that began to feel the present depression first. In Mr Mongredien's own words: "On examination we find that the industries which really did most suffer during the 'recent and present' depression are precisely those which we have enumerated above. The loudest and most justifiable complaints of distress have proceeded from the ship-owning interest—the ship-builders and their artisans, the iron and coal industries, the dock-labourers, and a few other classes more or less dependent on foreign trade."

Such, then, is the explanation given by the Cobden Club of trade depression—and a very good explanation it is, once it is rightly interpreted.

The reason that the good harvest of 1884 led to bad trade is because it enabled us to get such commodities as we required easier—that is to say, it lessened the amount of work that we had to do to supply the market with commodities. The demand for labour being thus lessened, a great many people were thrown out of work and suffered all sorts of privations. They were hungry because nature was too bountiful—because she had yielded so plentiful a supply of food! Work was scarce because there were more things made than we could use; and because there were more things made than we could use, a great many people had to go without even absolute necessities. A fine state of matters this for an enlightened age such as ours!