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The beginning of the sixteenth century found, as we have said, the commonwealth of beggars well within the bounds of society, and the orders of workmen—the privileged and the unprivileged—the two forming the germ of a society founded on capital and wage-labour. The privileged workmen became middle-class; the unprivileged, proletarians.

But apart from the guilds, the two classes were being created by the development of commerce, which needed them both as instruments for its progress. The merchant was the new noble of capital and of change; the demands of local markets were supplied by the direct exchange of the superfluity of the produce of the various districts and countries. All this was now being changed, and a world-market was being created. The commodities of one country were exchanged for the commodities of another, and the huckstering class grew up for the carrying on of this new commerce, and soon attained to power, amidst the rapid break-up of the old hierarchical social system of the old guilds.

The fall of Constantiople, which was followed in thirty years by the discovery of America, was a token of this great change. The Mediterranean was no longer the great commercial sea, with nothing beyond it but a few outlying stations. The towns of Central Europe—e.g., Augsburg, Nuremberg, Bruges, and the Hanse towns—were now sharing the market with Venice and Genoa, the children of Constantiople; there was no longer one great commanding city in Europe. But this was not all. In this change there was a turning over of the feudal society. As they conquered their enemy, the feudal nobles, they fell into the clutches of bureaucratic monarchs, who either swallowed them in their possession or worked them to death as to the most useful projects of conquest and centralisation. Charles V., e.g., played this game through South Germany, Austria, and the Netherlands, and with Venice, under cover of the so-called "Holy Roman Empire," while that lasted, he thrust them into possession of the sea and the earth, and disregarding his sham feudal empire, he bent all his efforts into turning these countries into a real bureaucratic State. In France the last liberties of the towns were crushed out. In England the plunders of the religious houses enabled Henry VIII. to found a new nobility, subservient to his own absolutism, in place of the ancient feudal nobility destroyed by their late civil war. In this way, the political bureaucratic nation was being developed. In France the long and fierce wars of the Burgundian and Armagnac factions gave opportunity for the consolidation of the monarchy, as they had at last effected by Louis XI., the forerunner, and the most successful king of France and the last successful one—Louis XIV.

In England the Wars of the Roses were not so bitter as the French wars, and the people took small part in them, except as vassals or the householders of the contending nobles; but they nevertheless played their part in the disruption of feudalism, not only by the thinning out of the nobles slain in battle or on the scaffold, but also by helping directly and indirectly to ‘push the workmen’ into the working classes.

Under the mediæval system the workmen, protected and oppressed by the lords of the manor and the guilds, were not available for the needs of commerce. The serfs ate up the part of the produce spared them by their masters and sold the rest as personal property to their neighbours without the help of a middle-man. In neither case was there anything left over for the supply of a great market.

The whole population of the world, led in her even then capacities for profit-grinding, if the tillage system of the manor and the yeoman's holdings could be got rid of. The landowners, ruined by their long war, saw the demand for English wool, and set themselves to the task of helping evolution with much of the vigour and unscrupulous pettifogging which has since won for their race the temporary command of the world-market. The tenants were rack-rented, the yeomen were expropriated, the labourers driven off the land into the towns, there to work as "free" labourers, and England thus contributed her share to commerce, paying for it with nothing more important than the loss of the rough joviality, plenty, and independence of spirit under which the administration of infringements committed by the feudal system and its abuses than the English were.

Thus all over Europe commercialism was rising. New needs were being created, new markets were getting fresh supply going, and were set free from old restraints to struggle for individual preponderance. A fresh intelligence and mental energy was shedding its light over the more solder side of the period of change. The study of the things of this world and whatever of it was of force became the mere affair of cultivated men, and also, since they did but half understand its spirit, was warping their minds into fresh error. Art was no longer religion and lineage and the harmonious expression of the thought of the people—but was growing up as a merely individual vanity and arrogant, and at the same time grew more and more retrospective and tainted with pedantry.

It was then that the old religion would no longer serve the new spirit of the times. The Mediæval Church, the kingdom of heaven on earth, in full sympathy with the temporal hierarchy, was doomed in the secret courts of the new and divinely appointed place, and while the old systems of restricted commerce and forbade usury, such a Church was no religion for the new commercialism; its religion must have nothing to do with the business of this world; so the individualistic ethics of Early Chris-

tianity, which had been kept in the background during the period of the Mediæval Church, were once more brought to the front and took the place of the corporate ethics of that Church, of which each one of the "faithful" was but a part. Whatever base uses their enthusiasm was put to by cooker heads, this revived Christianity took a real hold on most of the progressivist middle classes, especially in the north; so that Protestantism became the real religion of the new epoch, and even permeated Catholicism and gave it whatever true vitality it had; for its political part was an unreal survival from the Mediæval Church, and whatever it was of any significance was put out of date by cracy; a word which applies to the Protestant Churches just as much as the Catholic; and, in fact, everywhere the new religion became the state church. But this commercialism was not to be so, that the army officials always subservient to the authority of government and secondly by holding out to the people hopes outside their wretched life on earth, so as to quiet their discontent by turning their earthly aspirations heavenly. On the contrary, it was to lead the world alone to compete for the possession of privileges, and bade the poor pay no heed to the passing oppression of the day, which lived; it ended the series of civil wars which had been so common in England during the first years of the century. The revolt of the Anabaptists was an attempt to realise the kingdom of God upon earth literally and simply in a Communistic society based on supernaturalism, and was a protest of ignorant and oppressed men against the hardening of Christianity into bourgeois Protestantism, and of the hardening of feudal oppression into commercial exploitation.

The first of these was the feudal control of the markets, down, to give place to a new world, whose government, under cover of carrying on the old monarchies and varied classes of feudalism, was employed in one business only, the consolidation and continuance of the absolute property of the individual. It is true that in carrying out this function, the new society used the forms of the old, and asserted hereditary rights stiffy enough; but this was only in its transition from the old to the new. In the true spirit of the Middle Ages was dead, and its theory of society and authority in Church and State was gone. The kingdom of heaven of the Mediæval Church had left the earth, and did not concern itself with its doings except so far as they constituted the rude force of liberty or sin. A strange and human being to use it after a divinely ordained scheme. It was now the property of the absolute monarch, who might give it to whosoever he pleased, if he could find some one who would set him to work at the price of taking from him a part of the produce of his labour; which labour was now a commodity to be bought and sold in the market as the chattels were by common law. Of the working of this new form of privilege and slavery we shall see more in our next chapter.

E. Balfour Bax and William Morris.

(To be continued.)

OBJECTIONS TO SOCIALISM.

(A Reply to Mr. Charles Bradlaugh, M.P.)

IV

We now pass to a paragraph whose careful reading and re-reading many times almost leads to the conclusion that to our objector Socialism is only concerned with a change in the method of distribution of goods, and not with the most important question of all, providing for the work where and how and when it is done, and that primary question is the way in which our goods are produced, and the whole of that part of our expenditure which has no real value resulting from this, and the source of all capital in that surplus-value.

However, though we regret that our main point is thus unchallenged and ignored, let us take what we have and deal with it. "Socialists