

any manner engaged in productive labour who may enter the building—their especial building—the national museum of industrial arts.

The selection and use of this text is a circumstance which fairly indicates the true state of feeling on the part of the idle and other ruling classes towards the industrious population. In itself it is but a slight thing; but, however small it may be intrinsically, it is the keynote of the strain of caste superstition by which we are mastered, and the fact of its being put forward as a kind of governmental shibboleth in the manner it is makes it, I consider, a most valuable text for Socialists and all democrats. One may be able to mention a thousand things more characteristic of the relative positions of the industrious and the idle in this country, or bring to mind thoughts of the condition of mines and ships; remembrances of tragical intensity before which a merely written defiance is all emptiness; nevertheless the text should be regarded, for it is the official expression of the relations the "leisurely" governors intend to maintain towards the over-wrought millions of the country.

G. P.

FEUDAL ENGLAND.

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THE Great Council of the Realm was purely feudal; it was composed of the feudatories of the king, theoretically of all of them, practically of the great ones only. It was, in fact, the council of the conquering tribe with their chief at their head; the matters of the due feudal tribute, aids, reliefs, fines, sentage, and the like—in short, the king's revenue due from his men—were settled in this council at once and in the lump. But the inferior tribe, though not represented there, existed, and, as aforesaid, was growing rich, and the king had to get their money out of their purses directly; which as they were not represented at the Council, he had to do by means of his officers (the sheriffs) dealing with them one after another, which was a troublesome job; for the men were stiff-necked and quite disinclined to part with their money; and the robbery having to be done on the spot, so to say, encountered all sorts of opposition, and, in fact, it was the money needs both of baron, bishop, and king which had been the chief instrument in furthering the progress of the towns. The towns would be pressed by their lords, king, or baron, or bishop, as it might be, and they would see their advantage and strike a bargain. For you are not to imagine that because there was a deal of violence going on in those times there was no respect for law; on the contrary, there was a quite exaggerated respect for it if it came within the four corners of the feudal feeling, and the result of this feeling of respect was the constant struggle for *status* on the part of the townships and other associations throughout the Middle Ages. Well, the burghers would say, "Tis hard to pay this money, but we will put ourselves out to pay it if you will do something for us in return; let, for example, our men be tried in our own court, and the verdict be of one of compurgation instead of wager of battle," and so forth, and so forth. Well, all this sort of detailed bargaining was, in fact, a safeguard for the local liberties, so far as they went, of the towns and shires, and did not suit the king's views of law and order at all; and so began the custom of the sheriff (the king's officer, who had taken the place of the earl of the Anglo-Saxon period) summoning the burgesses to the council, which burgesses you must understand were not elected at the folk-motes of the town, or hundred (of which more hereafter), but in a sort of hole-and-corner way by a few of the bigger men of the place. What the king practically said was this: "I want your money, and I cannot be for ever wrangling with you stubborn churlcs at home there, and listening to all your stories of how poor you are and what you want; no, I want you to be *represented*. Send me up from each one of your communes a man or two whom I can bully or cajole or bribe to sign away your substance for you."

Under these circumstances it is no wonder that the towns were not very eager in the cause of *representation*. It was no easy job to get them to come up to London merely to consult as to the kind of sauce with which they were to be eaten. However, they did come in some numbers, and by the year 1295 something like a shadow of our present Parliament was on foot. Nor need there be much more said about this institution; as time went on its functions got gradually extended by the petition for the redress of grievances accompanying the granting of money, but it was generally to be reckoned on as subservient to the will of the king, who down to the later Tudor period played some very queer tunes on this constitutional instrument.

Edward I. gave place to his son, who again was of the type of king who had hitherto given the opportunity to the barons for their turn of advancement in the constitutional struggle; and in earlier times no doubt they would have taken full advantage of the circumstances; as it was they had little to gain. The king did his best to throw off the restraint of the feudal constitution, and to govern simply as an absolute monarch. After a time of apparent success he failed, of course, and only succeeded in confirming the legal rights of feudalism by bringing about his own formal deposition at the hands of the baronage, as a chief who, having broken the compact with his feudatories, had necessarily forfeited his right. If we compare his case with that of Charles I. we shall find this difference in it, besides the obvious one that Edward was held responsible to his feudatories and Charles towards the upper middle classes, the squirearchy, as represented by Parliament: that Charles was condemned by a law created for the purpose, so to say, and evolved from the principle of the representation of the propertied classes, while Edward's deposition was the real

logical outcome of the confirmed feudal system, and was practically legal and regular.

The successor of the deposed king, the Third Edward, ushers in the complete and central period of the Middle Ages in England. The feudal system is complete; the life and spirit of the country has developed into a condition if not quite independent, yet quite forgetful, on the one hand of the ideas and customs of the Celtic and Teutonic tribes, and on the other of the authority of the Roman Empire. The Middle Ages have grown into manhood; that manhood has an art of its own, which, though developed step by step from that of Old Rome and New Rome, and embracing the strange mysticism and dreamy beauty of the East, has forgotten both its father and its mother, and stands alone triumphant, the loveliest, brightest, and gayest of all the creations of the human mind and hand. It has a literature of its own too, somewhat akin to its art, yet inferior to it, and lacking its unity, since there is a double stream in it. On the one hand, the Court poet, the gentleman, Chaucer, with his Italianising metre, and his formal recognition of the classical stories; on which, indeed, he builds a superstructure of the quaintest and most unadulterated mediævalism, as gay and bright as the architecture which his eyes beheld and his pen pictured for us, so clear, defined, and elegant; a sunny world even amidst its violence and passing troubles, like those of a happy child, the worst of them an amusement rather than a grief to the onlookers; a world that scarcely needed hope in its eager life of adventure and love, amidst the sunlit blossoming meadows, and green woods, and white begilded manor houses. A kindly and human muse is Chaucer's, nevertheless, interested in and amused by all life, but of her very nature devoid of strong aspirations for the future; and that all the more, since, though the strong devotion and fierce piety of the ruder Middle Ages had by this time waned, and the Church was more often lightly mocked than either feared or loved, still the *habit* of looking on this life as part of another yet remained: the world is fair and full of adventure; kind men and true and noble are in it to make one happy; fools also to laugh at, and rascals to be resisted, yet not wholly condemned; and when this world is over we shall still go on living in another which is a part of this picture. Note all, and be as merry as you may, never forgetting that you are alive and that it is good to live.

That is the spirit of Chaucer's poetry; but alongside of it existed yet the ballad poetry of the people, wholly untouched by courtly elegance and classical pedantry; rude in art but never coarse, true to the back-bone; instinct with indignation against wrong, and thereby expressing the hope that was in it; a protest of the poor against the rich, especially in those songs of the Foresters, which have been called the mediæval epic of revolt; no more gloomy than the gentleman's poetry, yet cheerful from courage, and not content. Half-a-dozen stanzas of it are worth a cart-load of the whining introspective lyrics of to-day; and he who, when he has mastered the slight differences of language from our own daily speech, is not moved by it, does not understand what true poetry means nor what its aim is.

There is a third element in the literature of this time which you may call Lollard poetry, the great example of which is William Langland's 'Piers Plowman.' It is no bad corrective to Chaucer, and in *form* at least belongs wholly to the popular side; but it seems to me to show symptoms of the spirit of the rising middle class, and casts before it the shadow of the new master that was coming forward for the workman's oppression. But I must leave what more I have to say on this subject of the art and literature of the fourteenth century for another occasion. In what I have just said, I only wanted to point out to you that the Middle Ages had by this time come to the fullest growth; and that they could give expression, which was all their own, to the ideas and life of the time. That time was in a sense brilliant and progressive, and the life of the worker was better than it ever had been, and might compare with advantage with what it became in after periods and with what it is now; and indeed, looking back upon it, there are some minds and some moods that cannot help regretting it, and are not particularly scared by the idea of its violence and lack of accurate knowledge of scientific details; but, however, one thing is clear to us now, the kind of thing which never is clear to most people living in such periods, namely, that whatever it was, it could not last but must change into something else.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

(To be concluded.)

Who would have thought that Mr. Bradlaugh would ever become popular with the Tories. Yet Earl Weymss, who looks upon even Lord Salisbury as a dangerous Revolutionist, holds Mr. Bradlaugh up as an example to those who wantonly attack the right of property. The hon. member for Northampton thinks that £10,000 is not too much for a Lord Chancellor, and he was very indignant at the wickedness of his esteemed colleague, Mr. Labouchere, who wanted to reduce it to £8,000. Mr. Bradlaugh is so enamoured of the principle of competition as applied to workmen's wages, that one wonders he does not propose to put the post of Lord Chancellor up to competition. In these times of trade depression, even among the legal profession, we could surely get the work done at a cheaper rate than £10,000 a-year. But is it not strange that the head of the Liberty and Property Defence League, a body renowned for its championship of the rights of the classes to plunder the masses, should find occasion to praise so highly such an advanced Democrat as the hon. member for Northampton? A few years ago the Tories literally thirsted for Iconoclast's blood; now they laud him to the skies, "He is such a nice man, so different from those rude Irish members, and that insufferable Labouchere." Mr. Bradlaugh is doubtless proud of his popularity. A Radical member (?) whom the Tories are fond of is a curiosity that cannot be enough admired.—DIOGENES, in *Norwich Daylight*.