NEWS FROM NOWHERE:

or,

AN EPOCH OF REST.

BEING SOME CHAPTERS FROM A UTOPIAN ROMANCE.

CHAP. XI.—CONCLUDING GOVERNMENT.

"Now," said I, "I have come to the point of asking questions which I suppose will be dry for you to answer and difficult for you to explain; but I have foreseen for some time past that you must ask them, will I 'ill?' Is the kind of government you have? Has republicanism finally triumphed or have you come to a mere dictatorship, which some persons in the nineteenth century used to prophecy as the ultimate outcome of democracy? Indeed, this last question does not seem so very unreasonable, since you have turned your Parliament House into a dung-market. Or where do you house your present Parliament?"

The old man answered my smile with a hearty laugh, and said: "I tell you now shock you by telling you that we have no longer anything which you, a native of another planet, would call a government."

"I am not so much shocked as you might think," said I, "as I know something about governents. Tell me how you do, and how have you come to this state of things?"

Said he: "It is true that we have to make some arrangements about our affairs, concerning which you can ask presently; and it is also true that everybody does not always agree with the details of these arrangements; but, further, it is true that a man no more needs an elaborate system of government, with its army, navy, and police, to force him to give way to the will of the majority of his equals, than he wants a similar machinery to make him understand that his head and stone wall cannot occupy the same space at the same moment. Do you want further explanation?"

"Well, yes, I do," quoth I.

Old Hammond settled himself in his chair with a look of enjoyment which rather alarmed me, and made me dread a scientific dissertation: so I nodded and abided. He said:

"I suppose you know pretty well what the process of government was in the old times!"

"I am supposed to know," said I.

( Hammond) What was the government of those days? Was it really the Parliament or any part of it?"

(1) No.

(2) Was not the Parliament on the side a kind of watch-committee sitting to see that the interests of the Upper Classes took no hurt; and on the other side a sort of blind to delude the people into thinking that they had some share in the management of their own affairs?

(1) History seems to show us this.

(2) To what extent did the people manage their own affairs?

(1) I judge from what I have heard that sometimes they forced the Parliament to make a law to legalise some alteration which had already taken place.

(2) Anything else?

(1) I think not. As I am informed, if the people made any attempt to deal with the cause of their grievances the law stepped in and said, this is well-doing, or revolt, or what not, and slew or tortured the ringleaders of such attempts.

(2) If Parliament was not the government then, nor the people either, what was the government?

(1) Can you tell me?

(2) I think we shall not be far wrong if we say that government was the Law-Courts, backed up by the executive, which handled the business, and that the decent people allowed them to use for their own purposes; I mean the army, navy, and police.

(1) Reasonable men must needs think you are right.

(2) Now as to those Law-Courts. Were they places of fair dealing according to the ideas of the day? Had a poor man a good chance of defending his property and person in them? It is a commonplace that even rich men looked upon a law-suit as a dire misfortune, even if they gained the case; and as for a poor one—why, it was considered a miracle of justice and beneficence if a poor man who had once got into the clutches of the law escaped prison or utter ruin.

(2) It seems, then, my son, that the government by law-courts and police, which was the real government of the nineteenth century, was not a great success even to the people of that day, living under a class system which proclaimed inequality and poverty as the law of God and the bond which held the world together.

(1) So it seems, indeed.

(2) And now that all this is changed, and the "rights of property," which mean the clenching the fist on a piece of goods and crying out to the neighbours, You shan't have this!—now that all this has disappeared, so utterly that it is no longer possible even to jest upon its absurdity, is such a Government possible?

(1) It is impossible.

(2) Yes, happily. But for what other purpose than the protection of the rich from the poor, the strong from the weak, did this Government exist?

(1) I have heard that it was said that their office was to defend their own citizens against attack from other countries.

(2) It was said; but was anyone expected to believe this? For instance, did the English Government defend the English citizen against the French?

(1) So it was said.

(2) Then if the French had invaded England and conquered it, they would not have allowed the English workmen to live well? (I, laughing) As far as I can make out, the English masters of the English workmen saw to that: they took from their workmen as much of their livelihood as they dared, because they wanted it for themselves.

(1) But if the French didn't conquer, would they not have taken more still from the English workmen?

(2) I do not think so; for in that case the English workmen would have died of starvation; and then the French conquest would have ruined the French, just as if the English horses and cattle had died of underfeeding. So that after all, the English workmen would have been no worse off for the conquest: their French masters could have got no more from them than their English masters did.

(2) This is true; and we may admit that the pretensions of the government to defend the poor (i.e., the useful) people against other countries come to nothing. But that is but natural; for we have seen already that it was the function of government to protect the rich against the poor. But did not the government defend its rich men against other nations?

(2) I do not remember to have heard that the rich needed defence; because it is said that even when two nations were at war, the rich men of each nation gambled with each other pretty much as usual, and even sold each other weapons whereby to kill their own countrymen.

(1) In short, it comes to this, that whereas the so-called government of protection of property by means of the law-courts meant destruction of wealth, this defence of the citizens of one country against those of another country by means of war or the threat of war meant pretty much the same thing.

(1) I cannot deny it.

(2) Therefore the government really existed for the destruction of wealth?

(1) So it seems. And yet——

(2) Yet what?

(1) There were many rich people in those times.

(2) You see the consequences of that fact?

(1) I think I do. But tell me out what they were.

(2) If the government habitually destroyed wealth, the country must have been poor?

(1) Yes, certainly.

(2) Yet amidst this poverty the persons for the sake of whom the government existed insisted on being rich whatever might happen?
PRIMITIVE COMMUNISM.

I.

"The man who first enclosed a piece of land and said, this is mine, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civilized society," runs the much discussed phrase of the Discourse on the Origin of Inequality. This was the mode of acquiring property common; Hobbes, who, in England and France has exerted so powerful an influence on the formation of modern ideas had previously made the same supposition:

"Nature has given to each of us an equal right to all things," says Hobbes in De Cive. "In a state of nature every man has a right to do and to take whatever he pleases, whence the common saying that Nature has given to all men the right and licence whence it follows that in a state of nature utility is the rule of right."

This quotation will show Mr. Huxley that Rousseau cannot be charged with having reintroduced into Europe the "State of Nature" of the Greek stoics, whose philosophical doctrine was a protest against the social condition of the age.

The primitive communism of Hobbes and Rousseau was a mental conception which, probably, could not have been based on any fact duly established. Mr. Huxley, who is not to be put off with mental convictions, exclaims: "The confident assertions that the land was originally held in common by the whole nation are singularly ill-founded. And with equal confidence he avers: "Land was held as private or several property, and not as the property of the public or general body of the nation."

Let us see which of the two, the "ignorant" Rousseau or the learned Professor, is in the right; and, in order to that, we must address ourselves to the men who have been in contact with savages and barbarians.

Mr. Huxley, doubtless, has in his library the De Bello Gallico. Let him open it at Book VI. § 23, and he will read: "No German pos-

ses enclosed fields of any extent, but the magistrates and the chief men only possessing the common lands and fields which live in commum, in the year following compel them to go and settle elsewhere." One of the objects of this custom was "to uphold in the people the sense of equality, since every man sees his resources equal to those of the most powerful of his neighbors amongst whom the land was the common property of the entire nation. Elphinstone observed among the Afghan tribes, whom he had to combat, the same mode of possession of the land by the nation at large, and its periodical distribution among the clans and families composing the nation. Wherever one has been able to go back to the origin, one has met with common property in lands.

Much in his last and remarkable work on The Houses and House Life of the American Aborigines (1851), has collected a large number of examples of this primitive communism. He reproduces the following curious passage by the celebrated Mexican missionary, Hocquelot, who lived with the Indians from 1771 to 1786, and understood their languages:—"The Indians think that the Great Spirit has made the earth, and all that it contains, for the common good of mankind; when it grew to a great quantity of game, it was not for the good of a few, but of all. Everything is given in common to the sons of men. Whatever liveth on the land, whatever groweth out of the earth, and all that is in the rivers and waters, was given joint to all, and every one is entitled to his share. Hospitality with them is not a virtue, but a strict duty. . . . They would lie down on an empty stomach rather than have it left to their charge that they had neglected to eat. The art of the strangers, or the needy. . . . because they have a common right to be helped out of the common stock; for if the meat they have been served with was taken from the wood, it was common to all before joining; take it: if corn and vegetables, it had grown out of the common ground, yet not by the power of man, but by that of the Great Spirit."

G. Catlin who during eight years journeyed among the savage tribes of North America, relates that "every man, woman, or child in Indian communities is allowed to enter any one's lodge, and eat that of the chief of the nation, and eat when they are hungry. . . . Even so can they take what they will and most wastefully drop of the crops, if he is too lazy to supply himself—or to hunt, he may walk into any of the fields, and the people will share with him as long as there is anything to eat. . . . Certain that when he goes who is able to hunt pays dear for his meat, for he is expected to take as much as he can eat; but the men of the same kind have not the custom of going out. In the religious and communalistic practices, which were once general, were maintained in Lecedornia long after the Spaniards had issued out of barbarism."

Mr. Huxley, who has collected the customs of the Iroquois, among whom he dwelt, tells us that they cultivated the land in common and divided the crops, the corn, and fish among the families of the clans. Frequently the division was made per every female head; but the provisions were only left in keeping for them, they were always at the disposal of the community.

But Huxley, collecting the facts related by Cesar, Elphinstone, and Morgan, whose intelligence and power of observation nobody will think of disputing, confirms the supposition of Rousseau that Professor Huxley ridicules in so superior a way. The land has been held in common by the famous clan of savage nations, and each and every nation the more than they lasted, procured by the common labour of all the clans.

The primitive communism of the land and its produce established perfect social and political equality among all the members of a nation.

The war-chief, on returning to his village loses his power: "he is obeyed by the children and sucklings, supported by the aged, and carried on the shoulders by the magistrate is a purely moral one; chiefs and magistrates were elected by universal suffrage. The woman frequently took a part in the deliberations of the council. "The Germans," says Thucydides, "attributed a sacred and propitious character to the ark ui domum et providum. But it was in the distribution of the food at meals that this equality manifested itself. The men and women ate apart. Every portion received from the hands of the women was divided it was before there were neither chairs nor tables in their long houses, he ate his food where he pleased. The women and children took their meals after the men."

The mystics, the common repasts of Greece, are simply a reproduction of those of the Iroquois described by Mora repast.

Hersaedius of Pontus, the disciple of Plato, has preserved for us a description of the communalistic repasts of Creta, where the primitive communism was prevalent. Assumption, it is easy, every adult citizen received an equal share, except the Arkhen, member of the council of the ancients (geronia), who received a special portion—one in his quality of simple citizen, another in that of president of the table and in his additional portions for the care of the hall and furniture. All the tables were under the supervision of a matriarch, who distributed the food and ostensibly set aside the choicest bits for the men who had distinguished themselves in the council or on the battlefield. Strangers were served first, even before the archon. A vessel with wine and water was handed round from guest to guest; at the end of the repast it was replenished. Hersaeus mentions common repasts of the men only, but Hoeck asserts that in the Dorian cities there were also repasts of women and children. Our knowledge of the constant separation of the sexes among savages and barbarians is derived from the Iroquois, who were probably the nearest relatives of the ancients. Plutarch informs us that at these common repasts no one person was considered as superior to the other, wherefore he styles them aristocratic assemblies (macedonitates paraboreiatae). The persons who sat down at the same table were probably males known for their merit.

In Sparta the members of a sysitia were formed into corresponding military divisions, and fought together. Savages and barbarians, accustomed at all times to act in common, in battle always range themselves according to families, clans and tribes.

It was of such imperative necessity that every member of the clan should get his share of the aliments, that in the Greek language the word moiras, which signifies the portion of a guest, bears the meaning of "symbol of what was just; in the same way that the