

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN SOCIETY.

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To these about the eleventh century were superadded another set of guilds, whose main object was the protection of trade, and which soon became powerful, and establishing themselves in the towns, drew together with the corporations, the freemen of the towns, and were fused with them. They shared in the degeneration of the municipal aristocracies, which reached its height in the beginning of the thirteenth century, and with them were attacked by the third and last set of guilds, whose office was the organization and protection of the handicrafts. These of course had been growing up with the growth of the towns, and the increasing capacity for production, and and at the time I mention were organized pretty completely, and embraced, I think, the whole of the handicrafts.

The greater part of the thirteenth century was taken up by the struggle between these new and quite democratic guilds, which were entirely composed of workmen; that struggle was partly a peaceable one. The municipalities could not quite keep the guilds from all participation in the government of the towns; their officers gradually crept into the corporations, and they began to influence the administration; but this peaceful revolution was supplemented by very hard fighting, especially in the north of Germany. The upshot of this double struggle was the complete victory of the workmen over the municipal aristocracies, and by the end of the thirteenth century the craft guilds, who no doubt had been fostered all along by the increasing productivity of labour, had the towns entirely in their power; but, although the municipal aristocracy had lost its privileged official position, the old families had not lost all their influence, and still formed a kind of middle-class nobility; this is exemplified clearly enough by the incidents in the struggle between the great town of Ghent and its feudal superior, the Earl of Flanders, in which men like James Van Artavelde and his sons clearly had a position akin to that of powerful rich men at the present day. The old struggle also was not forgotten; throughout the men of the mean crafts are on the revolutionary side; while the great crafts, led by the mariners, *i.e.*, the shippers, merchants, and so on, are loyalists.

This victory of the handicraftsmen brings us to the apex of the Middle Ages. Let us therefore stop a little to contrast the condition of labour at that period with its condition under the height of the classical period, and see what it has gained. The classical period gives us a class of privileged persons actually idle as far as any good purpose goes, supporting a huge class of parasites, and an enormous pauper population fed on *charity*, and all this founded on the labour of mere chattel slaves, who were fed clothed and housed according to the convenience of their owners, just as beasts of burden were, but whom they had to buy with hard cash just as they had their horses and mules. There was a certain amount of labour done by freemen, or non-slaves rather, but that did not come to much, and I think we may class these few freemen among the parasites of the rich. The government of all this was aristocratic at first (tempered by the money-bag aristocracy), and at last mere absolutism founded on tax-gathering.

In the fully developed Middle Ages, on the other hand, we have a privileged class of land-holders deduced from the freemen of the conquering tribe, absolutely idle, supported by their serfs, who for their part are somewhat speedily turning into tenants, and so laying part of the foundations of the later middle-class. Between these two classes, which in the beginning of the Middle Ages were the essential constituents of society, lies the great body of the craftsmen, now gathered into towns administered by themselves, oppressed always, no doubt, legally by taxes, and often illegally by war on the part of the nobles, but free in their work except for such regulations as they have imposed on themselves, and the object of which in the main was the equitable distribution of employment, and the reward of employment throughout their whole body. Capitalism does not exist at this time; there is no great all-embracing world-market; production is for the supply of the neighbourhood, and only the surplus of it ever goes a dozen miles from the door of the worker. It must be added that every freeman has the use of land to support himself on, so that he does not depend on the caprice of the market for his bare necessities, and whether employer or employed, he neither sells himself, nor buys others, in the labour market under the rule of competition, but exchanges labour for labour directly with his neighbour, man to man and hand to hand.

Now, you will probably agree with me in thinking that this was a much better state of things for the worker than his condition under what have been called the "*free* peoples of antiquity," but whose freedom was confined to the rich and powerful. One other thing I note in this contrast, that whereas in the ancient world, the intelligence, the high mental qualities, which have made the ancient days so famous, came from the idle classes, who were in good sooth an aristocracy of intellect as well as of position, in the Middle Ages, the intelligence lay with the great craftsmen class,—and that again, I think, was a decided advantage, both for them and for us; since it has given us, amongst other treasures not so famous, but scarcely less glorious, the poems of Shakespear.

Now, on this high tide of mediæval life supervened two things: the Black Death, and the gradual decay of the guilds, both of which got the times ready for the next great change in the condition of labour. I will say little about the first, space not serving for it. I will only remark first, that the Statute of Labourers of Edward III., which was one consequence of it, and which has been so useful to enquirers into the

condition of labour at that time, represents in the account of wages and labour-hours to be drawn from it, the state of things *before* the terrible plague, not *after* it, since it was avowedly enacted against the labourers in order to lower their wages to the standard of reward before the Black Death.

Furthermore, I must say that all antiquarians must be fully conscious of the decline in art that took place in Northern Europe, and in England especially, after the reign of Edward III. Before the middle of the fourteenth century the English were in these matters abreast with, and in some matters ahead of, the Italians, and in the art of architecture especially, produced works which have never been surpassed, and seldom equalled. By the end of the fifteenth century our arts had for the most part become rude, unfinished and barbarous, and lacking altogether in that self-respect and confidence which the arts are always full of in their fine periods.

Looking carefully at the gradual change, I conclude that the Black Death was answerable for some of this degradation, but that the main part of it was the natural consequence of the great change which was coming over society. For during the next century, a new plague invaded Europe, compared with which the slaughter of the Black Death was but a trifle. That plague was the pest of Commercialism; capitalism aided by bureaucracy and nationalism, began to show itself, and took away from labour the hope of a happy life on the earth.

At the end of the fourteenth century, there were no journeymen in the guilds; every worker in them was certain to become a master if he only did his duty fairly; and the master was not the master in our sense of the word, he was the man who had learned his craft thoroughly, and could teach the apprentices their business, and all sorts of restrictions were laid on him to prevent his becoming a capitalist, *i.e.*, forcing men as good as himself to pay him for his privilege of providing them with work. But in the early days of the fifteenth century the journeyman began to appear; there were men in the workshops who were known as "servants," and, who though necessarily affiliated to the guild, and working under its regulations, would never become crafts-masters. They were few and unimportant enough, but they grew in numbers, till, *e.g.*, about 1480 the non-guildsmen of the merchant-tailors in London attempted to form a guild under the old craft guild, just as those latter had formed their guilds under the trades guilds. In this attempt they failed, showing thereby how the times were changing, and how employment for profit was raising its hideous head. This falling of the craft guilds from their old simplicity of equality, was doubtless a token rather than a cause of the change. Capitalism was advancing from other directions. The productivity of labour was increasing, though slowly; more wealth was being produced, and men's greedy desires grew with it. The landed nobility began to see how they might recover their losses in war, and become as rich in relation to other people as they had been when the latter were so poor; and they were no longer contented, as they once were obliged to be, to live on the rents of their land, whether those rents were the enforced service of serfs, or the money rent of tenants, both limited by the custom of the manor. The Peasants Rebellion in England had foiled them in their attempt to rack-rent their tenants, growing prosperous, by forcing them to pay serfs' services on villeinage tenures as well as tenant's rent. But no matter; in spite of the high wages and comfort of the craftsmen and yeomen, *they* were the powerful people, since they were the makers and interpreters of the laws, and since the meetings round the Shire Oak and the folk-motes of the freemen of the Hundred, and other such direct local assemblies, had been swallowed up in the representative assembly, the central parliament, the King's taxing machine. So they set to work to steal, not a purse here, or a bale of goods there, or the tolls of a market in another place; but the very life and soul of the community, the *land* of the country, which was of the more importance, as in those days no direct rent could be got out of anything save the land. They got the yeomen and tenants off the land by one means or another; legal quibbling, direct cheating, down-right violence; and so got hold of the lands and used their produce, not for the livelihood of themselves and their retainers, but for profit. The land of England, such of it as was used for cultivation, had been mostly tillage where tillage was profitable; it was the business of the land thieves to turn this tillage into pasture for the sake of the sheep, *i.e.*, the wool for exportation. This game not only drove the yeoman and tenant off the land, but the labourer also, since, as More says "Many sheep and one shepherd now take the place of many families." As a result, not only was a pauper population created, but the towns were flooded by crowds of the new free labourers, whom the guilds, grown corrupt, were ready to receive as journeymen. The huckstering landlord and the capitalist farmer drove the workman into the hands of the new manufacturing capitalist, and a middle-class of employers of labour was created, the chief business of whose fathers was to resist the rich, and the business of whose sons was to oppress the poor.

WILLIAM MORRIS.

(To be concluded).

MODERN RADICALS.—There is a class of revolutionists named Girondins, whose fate in history is remarkable enough! Men who rebel or urge others to rebel, ought to have other than formulas to go upon. Men who discern in the misery of the toiling, complaining millions not misery, but only a raw material which can be wrought upon and traded in, for one's own poor hide-bound theories and egoisms; to whom millions of living human creatures, with beating hearts in their bosoms, beating, suffering, hoping, are "masses," mere "explosive masses for blowing down Bastilles with," for voting at hustings for us: such men are of the questionable species.—*Carlyle: 'Chartism.'*