THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN SOCIETY.

(Continued from p. 244.)

To these about the eleventh century were superadded another asset of guilds, whose main object was the protection of trade, and which soon became powerful, and establishing themselves in the towns, drew toward them the greater part of the freemen of the towns, and were fused with them. They shared in the government of the free cities, and they were the first to establish the handicrafts. These of course had been growing up along with the growth of the towns, and the increasing capacity for production, and at the time I mention were organized pretty completely, and extended their power to the entire area.

The greater part of the thirteenth century was taken up by the struggle between these new and quite democratic guilds, which were entirely independent of the cities, and the old aristocratic guilds, which had still their strongholds in the cities. The guilds, by the way, is one of the few words of foreign origin we use in English. The word guild in our language means a society of gentlemen, or the like, who meet in a hall, and the Paston letters are full of these meetings that they held by day, and by night, especially in the north of Germany. The upshot of this 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 position, there was still not less advantage on the part of the workmen. The formation of a kind of middle-class nobility: this is exemplified clearly enough by the incidents in the struggle between the great town of Obert and its feudal superior, the Earl of Flanders, in which men like Jean Limagne and Agnès de Flavigny, who are the most typically aristocratic of powerful rich men at the present day. The old struggle also was not forgotten; throughout the mean of the mean crafts are on the revolution, but the great crafts, led by the mariners, e.g., the skippers, merchants, and so forth, were still in alliance with the aristocracy.

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 the beginning of the modern period with that at the beginning 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 large class of parasites, and an enormous pauper population. The foundation of the guilds, which were essentially beneficial, and 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 privilege of classes of labourers induced from the freemen of the conquering tribe, absolutely idle, of course, as serfs, but, at least, their part is somewhat speedily turning into tenants, and so laying the foundation of the later middle-class. Between these two classes there was a marked difference. In the beginning of the Middle Ages are the representatives of the great and small classes 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 nobility, but not so much as to be stopped from doing as they did. In all, the conditions were such as to be imposed on themselves, and the object of which in the main was the equitable distribution of employment, and the reward of employment therein. That the Black Death was a revolution is not to say, that was a 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 for 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 Black Death, the art of the fifteenth century is almost always abreast with, and in some matters ahead of, the Italians, and in the art of architecture especially, produced works which have never been equaled in Sweep, and gold-splendid. The very end of the fifteenth century our arts had for the most part become dead, uninterested, and lacking altogether in that self-respect and confidence which the arts are always full of in their fine periods.

In speaking carefully, 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 swept over Europe, compared with which the Black Death was but a trite. That plague was the pest of Commercialism; capitalism aided by bureaucracy and nationalism, began to show itself, and took away from the 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 genial period, by for he was no hostler, 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 pro- ducing wages. The true capitalist, when the work done by the journeymen began to appear; there were men in the workshops who were known as "servants," and, who though they were not really official masters, yet, however, would never become crafts-masters. They were few and unimportant enough, but they grew in numbers, till, e.g., about 1480 the non-guilds men of the merchant-tailors in London attempted to form a guild of their own. The old guild, just as a landlord, lived on under the old laws, and the. New thought was not wanted. It was 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 position, and the making of every industry a profit-making concern, was denominated by the change.

Capitalism was advancing from other directions. The productivity of labour was increasing, though slowly; more wealth was produced by the same amount of labour, and therefore the same amount of wages per head. This, of course, made the nobility begin 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 had been obliged to be, to live on the rents of their land, whether those were the enforced service of serfs, or the money rent of tenants, both limited by the customary of the manor. The Peasants Rebellion in England had failed them in their attempt to rack-rent their tenants, or such as were not in the habit of producing beyond what was necessitated by the needs of town and country; so that the townsmen, who, since the meetings round the Shire Oak and the folkmotes of the free men of the Hundred, and other such direct local assemblies, had been swallowed up in the representative assembly, the central parliament, and the tax-collecting machine, were ready to rise in arms to maintain their right to live, or as a great deal of the time, to pay a certain sum to those days no direct rent could be got out of anything save the land.

The tenant and tenant 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 or their retainers, but for profit. The land of England, such as it 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 their flocks and sheep, i.e., for the increase of this demand. The yeoman, who 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 a hundred families," as a result the land was broken up, 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 lockstgter 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.

(To be concluded).

MEDITATION ON THE SCHEMOREWALT.

There is a class of revolutionaries 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 the danger of the hour, are called upon to make a new material which can be wrought upon and traded in, for one's own poor hide-bound theories and egoism; to whom millions of living human creatures, with beating hearts in their bosoms, beating, suffering, they are "more "explosive masses for blowing down Bastille with," for writing at settings for us: such men are of the questionable species.—Curate: "Citizen."