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THE DIFFICULTIES OF INDIVIDUALISM.

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OF all the intellectual difficulties of Individualism, the greatest, perhaps, is that which is presented by the constant flux of things. Whatever may be the advantages and conveniences of the present state of society, we are, at any rate, all of us, now sure of one thing—that it cannot last.

The Constant Evolution of Society.

We have learnt to think of social institutions and economic relations as being as much the subjects of constant change and evolution as any biological organism. The main outlines of social organization, based upon the exact sphere of private ownership in England to-day, did not “come down from the Mount.”

The very last century has seen an almost complete upsetting of every economic and industrial relation in the country, and it is irrational to assume that the existing social order, thus new-created, is destined inevitably to endure in its main features unchanged and unchangeable. History did not stop with the last great convulsion of the Industrial Revolution, and Time did not then suddenly cease to be the Great Innovator. Nor do the Socialists offer us a statical heaven to be substituted for an equally statical world here present. English students of the last generation were accustomed to think of Socialism as a mere Utopia, spun from the humanity-intoxicated brains of various Frenchmen of the beginning of this century. Down to the present generation every aspirant after social reform, whether Socialist or Individualist, naturally embodied his ideas in a detailed plan of a new social order, from which all contemporary evils were eliminated. Bellamy is but a belated Cabet, Babœuf, or Campanella. But modern Socialists have learnt the lesson of evolution better than their opponents, and it cannot be too often repeated that Socialism, to Socialists, is not a Utopia which they have invented, but a principle of social organization which they assert to have been discovered by the patient investigators into sociology whose labors have distinguished the present century. That principle, whether true or false, has, during a whole generation, met with an ever-increasing, though often unconscious, acceptance by political administrators.

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Thus, it is the constant flux of things which underlies all the "difficulties" of Individualism. Whatever we may think of the existing social order, one thing is certain—namely, that it will undergo modification in the future as certainly and steadily as in the past. Those modifications will be partly the result of forces not consciously initiated or directed by human will. Partly, however, the modifications will be the results, either intended or unintended, of deliberate attempts to readjust the social environment to suit man's real or fancied needs. It is therefore not a question of *whether* the existing social order shall be changed, but of *how* this inevitable change shall be made.

"Social Problems."

In the present phase of acute social compunction, the mal-adjustments which occasion these modifications appear to us in the guise of "social problems." But whether or not they are the subjects of conscious thought or conscious action, their influence is perpetually at work, silently or obtrusively modifying the distribution of social pressure, and altering the web of that social tissue of which our life is made. The characteristic feature of our own age is not this constant evolution itself—for that, of course, is of all time—but our increasing consciousness of it. Instead of unconscious factors we become deliberate agents, either to aid or resist the developments coming to our notice. Human selection accordingly becomes the main form of natural selection, and functional adaptation replaces the struggle for existence as the main factor in social progress. Man becomes the midwife of the great womb of Time, and necessarily undertakes the responsibility for the new economic relations which he brings into existence.

Hence the growing value of correct principles of social action, of valid ideals for social aspiration. Hence, therefore, the importance, for weal or for woe, of the change in social ideals and principles which marks off the present generation of Socialists from the surviving economists and statesmen brought up in the "Manchester school." We may, of course, prefer not to accept the watchwords or shibboleths of either party; we may carefully guard ourselves against "the falsehood of extremes"; we may believe that we can really steer a middle course. This comforting reflection of the practical man is, however, an unphilosophical delusion. As each difficulty of the present day comes up for solution, our action or inaction must, for all our caution, necessarily incline to one side or the other. We may help to modify the social organism either in the direction of a more general Collectivism or in that of a more perfect Individualism; it will be hard, even by doing nothing, to leave the balance just as it was. It becomes, accordingly, of vital importance to examine not only our practical policy but also our ideals and principles of action, even if we do not intend to follow these out to their logical conclusion.

Individualism and Collectivism.

It is not easy, at the present day, to be quite fair to the opinions of the little knot of noble-minded enthusiasts who broke for us the chains of the oligarchic tyranny of the eighteenth century. Their work was essentially destructive, and this is not the place in which to estimate how ably they carried on their statical analysis, or how completely they misunderstood the social results of the industrial revolution which was falsifying all their predictions almost before they were uttered. But we may, perhaps, not unfairly sum up as follows the principles which guided them in dealing with the difficulties of social life: that the best government is that which governs least; that the utmost possible scope should be allowed to untrammelled individual enterprise; that open competition and complete freedom from legal restrictions furnish the best guarantees of a healthy industrial community; that the desired end of "equality of opportunity" can be ultimately reached by allowing to each person the complete ownership of any riches he may become possessed of; and that the best possible social state will result from each individual pursuing his own interest in the way he thinks best.

Fifty years' further social experience have destroyed the faith of the world in the validity of these principles as the basis of even a decent social order, and Mr. John Morley himself has told us* that "the answer of modern statesmanship is that unfettered individual competition is not a principle to which the regulation of industry may be intrusted."

"It is indeed certain," sums up Dr. Ingram, at the end of his comprehensive survey of all the economic tendencies, "that industrial society will not permanently remain without a systematic organization. The mere conflict of private interests will never produce a well-ordered commonwealth of labor."†

Modern Socialism is, accordingly, not a faith in an artificial Utopia, but a rapidly-spreading conviction, as yet only partly conscious of itself, that social health and consequently human happiness is something apart from and above the separate interests of individuals, requiring to be consciously pursued as an end in itself; that the lesson of evolution in social development is the substitution of consciously regulated co-ordination among the units of each organism for their internecine competition;‡ that the production and distribution of wealth, like any other public function, cannot safely be intrusted to the unfettered freedom of individuals, but needs to be organized and controlled for the benefit of the whole community; that this can be imperfectly done by means of legislative restriction and taxation, but is eventually more advantageously accomplished through the collective enterprise of the appropriate administrative

* *Life of Cobden*, vol. i., ch. xiii., pp. 298, 303.

† Article "Political Economy," in *Ency. Brit.*, ninth edition, vol. xix., 1886, p. 382; republished as *History of Political Economy*.

‡ See Professor Huxley's pregnant declaration to this effect in the *Nineteenth Century*, February, 1888. Compare D. G. Ritchie's *Darwinism and Politics*.

unit in each case ; and that the best government is accordingly that which can safely and successfully administer most.

The New Pressure for Social Reform.

But although the principles of Individualism have long been tacitly abandoned by our public men, they have remained, until quite recently, enshrined in the imagination of the middle class citizen and the journalist. Their rapid supersession in these days, by principles essentially Socialist, is due to the prominence now given to "social problems," and to the failure of Individualism to offer any practicable solution of these. The problems are not in themselves new ; they are not even more acute or pressing than of yore ; but the present generation is less disposed than its predecessors to acquiesce in their insolubility. This increasing social compunction in the presence of industrial disease and social misery is the inevitable result of the advent of political democracy. The power to initiate reforms is now rapidly passing into the hands of those who themselves directly suffer from the evils to be removed ; and it is therefore not to be wondered at that social re-organization is a subject of much more vital interest to the proletarian politicians of to-day than it can ever have been to the University professors or Whig proprietors of the past.

Now the main "difficulties" of the existing social order, with which Individualist principles fail to deal, are those immediately connected with the administration of industry and the distribution of wealth. To summarize these difficulties before examining them, we may say that the Socialist asserts that the system of private property in the means of production permits and even promotes an extreme inequality in the distribution of the annual product of the united labors of the community. This distribution results in excess in the hands of a small class, balanced by positive privation at the other end of the social scale. An inevitable corollary of this unequal distribution is wrong production, both of commodities and of human beings ; the preparation of senseless luxuries whilst there is need for more bread, and the breeding of degenerate hordes of a demoralized "residuum" unfit for social life. This evil inequality and disastrous malproduction are enabled to continue through the individual ownership of the instruments of industry, one inevitable accompaniment of which is the continuance, in the commercial world, of that personal rule which is rapidly being expelled from political administration. The increasing integration of the Great Industry is, indeed, creating—except in so far as it is counteracted by the adoption of Socialist principles—a kind of new feudalism, based upon tenure, not of land, but of capital employed in the world-commerce, a financial autocracy against which the democracy sullenly revolts. In the interests of this oligarchy, the real interests of each community tend to be ignored, to the detriment of its capacity to hold its own in the race struggle—that competition between communities rather than between individuals in a community which is perhaps now becoming the main field of natural selection.

In examining each of these difficulties in greater detail, it will be fair to consider, not only how far they can be solved by the existing order and in what way they are actually being dealt with by the application of Socialist principles, but also what hope might, on the other hand, be found in the greatest possible development of Individualism. For to-day it is the Individualist who is offering us, as a solution of social difficulties, an untried and nebulous Utopia; whilst the Socialist occupies the superior position of calling only for the conscious and explicit adoption and extension of principles of social organization to which the stern logic of facts has already driven the practical man. History and experiment have indeed changed sides, and rank now among the allies of the practical Socialist reformer. Factory Acts and municipal gas-works we know, but the voice of Mr. Auberon Herbert, advocating "voluntary taxation," is as the voice of one crying in the wilderness.

Inequality of Income.

Inequality in wealth distribution is, of course, no new thing, and it is unnecessary to contend that the inequality of the present age is more flagrant than that of its predecessors. The extreme depth of poverty of those who actually die of starvation is, indeed, obviously no less than before; and when 30 per cent. of the five million inhabitants of London are found to be inadequately supplied with the bare necessities of life, and probably a fourth of the entire community become paupers at 65, it would profit us little to enquire whether this percentage is greater or less than that during the Middle Ages. On the other hand, the wealth production of the community advances by leaps and bounds, being now far greater than ever it was, and greater than that of any other country of the Old World. The riches of a comparatively small number of the owners of our land and capital are colossal and increasing.

Nor is there any doubt or dispute as to the causes of this inequality. The supersession of the Small by the Great Industry has given the main fruits of invention and the new power over Nature to a comparatively small proprietary class, upon whom the mass of the people are dependent for leave to earn their living. When it suits any person having the use of land and capital to employ the worker, this is only done on condition that two important deductions, rent and interest, can be made from his product, for the benefit of two, in this capacity, absolutely unproductive classes—those exercising the bare ownership of land and capital. The reward of labor being thus reduced, on an average, by about one-third, the remaining eightpence out of the shilling is then shared between the various classes who *have* co-operated in the production—including the inventor, the managing employer, and the mere wage-worker—but shared in the competitive struggle in such a way that at least fourpence goes to a favored set of educated workers, numbering less than one-fifth of the whole, leaving four-fifths to divide less than fourpence out of the shilling between them. The consequence is the social condition we see around us. A fortunate few, owing to

their legal power over the instruments of wealth-production, command the services of thousands of industrial slaves whose faces they have never seen, without rendering any service to them or to society in exchange. A larger body of persons contribute some labor, but are able, from their cultivated ability or special education, to choose occupations for which the competition wage is still high, owing to the small number of possible competitors. These two classes together number only one-fifth of the whole. On the other hand is the great mass of the people, the weekly wage-earners, four out of five of the whole population, toiling perpetually for less than a third of the aggregate product of labor, at an annual wage averaging at most £40 per adult, hurried into unnecessarily early graves by the severity of their lives, and dying, as regards at least one-third of them, destitute or actually in receipt of poor-law relief.

Few can doubt the fundamental causes of this inequality of condition. The abstraction from the total of over one-third of the product necessarily makes a serious inroad in that which the "niggardliness of Nature" allows us, and the distribution of the remaining two-thirds is, of course, itself fatally affected by the secondary results of the division into "two nations" which the private appropriation of rent and interest creates.

Can we Dodge the Law of Rent?

Individualists may tell us of the good things that the worker could get for himself by thrift and sobriety, prudence and saving, but no economist will for a moment suggest that any conceivable advance in these virtues would remove the fundamental inequality arising from the phenomenon of rent. The mere worker, *quâ* worker, is necessarily working, as far as its own remuneration is concerned, on the very worst land in economic use, with the very minimum advantage of industrial capital. Every development towards a freer Individualism must, indeed, inevitably emphasize the power of the owner of the superior instruments of wealth-production to obtain for himself all the advantages of their superiority. Individualists may prefer to blink this fact, and to leave it to be implied that, somehow or other, the virtuous artizan can dodge the law of rent. But against this complacent delusion of the philanthropist political economy emphatically protests. So long as the instruments of production are in unrestrained private ownership, so long must the tribute of the workers to the drones continue: so long will the toilers' reward inevitably be reduced by their exactions. No tinkering with the land laws can abolish or even diminish economic rent, however much it may result in the redistribution of this tribute. The *whole* equivalent of every source of fertility or advantage of all land over and above the worst in economic use is under free competition necessarily abstracted from the mere worker on it. So long as Lady Matheson can "own" the island of Lewis, and (as she says) do what she likes with her own—so long as the Earls of Derby can appropriate at their ease the unearned increment of Bootle or Bury—it is the very emphatic teaching of political economy that the

earth may be the Lord's, but the fulness thereof must inevitably be the landlord's.

There is an interesting episode in English history among James I.'s disputes with the Corporation of London, then the protector of popular liberties. James, in his wrath, threatened to remove the Court to Oxford. "Provided only your Majesty leave us the Thames," cleverly replied the Lord Mayor. But economic dominion is more subtle than kingcraft—our landlords steal from us even the Thames. No Londoner who is not a landlord could, under completely free Individualism, obtain one farthing's worth of economic benefit from the existence of London's ocean highway; the whole equivalent of its industrial advantage would necessarily go to swell the compulsory tribute of London's annual rental.

It has often been vaguely hoped that this iron law was true only of land, and that, in some unexplained way, the worker did get the advantage of other forms of industrial capital. But further economic analysis shows, as Whately long ago hinted, that rent is a genus of which land rent is only one species. The worker in the factory is now seen to work no shorter hours or gain no higher wages merely because the product of his labor is multiplied a hundred-fold by machinery which he does not own.

Whatever may be the effect of invention on the wages of one generation as compared with the last, it has now become more than doubtful to economists whether the worker can count on getting any more of the product of the machine, in a state of "complete personal liberty," than his colleague contemporaneously laboring at the very margin of cultivation with the very minimum of capital. The artisan producing boots by the hundred in the modern machine works of Southwark or Northampton gets no higher wages than the surviving hand cobbler in the by-street. The whole differential advantage of all but the worst industrial capital, like the whole differential advantage of all but the worst land, necessarily goes to him who legally owns it. The mere worker can have none of them. "The remuneration of labor, as such," wrote Cairnes in 1874,* "skilled or unskilled, can never rise much above its present level."

The "Population Question."

Neither can we say that it is the increase of population which effects this result. During the present century, indeed, in spite of an unparalleled increase in numbers, the wealth annually produced in England *per head* has nearly doubled.† If population became stationary to-morrow, and complete personal liberty prevailed, with any amount of temperance, prudence, and sympathy, the present rent and interest would not be affected; our numbers determine,

* *Some Leading Principles*, p. 348.

† Hence the remarkable suppression of "Malthusianism" in all recent economic literature, notably the hand-books of Symes, Cannan, Ely, and Gonner; and its significantly narrow subordination in Prof. Marshall's *Principles of Economics*. The birth-rate of Great Britain is now apparently lower than it has ever been during the whole of the past century, and it seems tending steadily downwards.

indeed, how bad the margin of cultivation will be, and this is of serious import enough; but, increase or no increase, the private ownership of land and capital necessarily involves the complete exclusion of the mere worker, as such, from all the economic advantages of the fertile soil on which he is born, and of the buildings, machinery, and railways he finds around him.

The "Wickedness" of Making any Change.

Few Individualists, however, now attempt to deny the economic conclusion that the private ownership of land and capital necessarily involves a serious *permanent* inequality in the distribution of the annual product of the community; and that this inequality bears no relation to the relative industry or abstinence of the persons concerned. They regard it, however, as impossible to dispossess equitably those who now levy the tribute of rent and interest, and they are therefore driven silently to drop their original ideal of equality of opportunity, and to acquiesce in the *perpetual* continuance of the inequality which they vainly deplore. It is immoral, we are told, to take any step, by taxation or otherwise, which would diminish even by a trifle the income of the present owners of the soil and their descendants for ever and ever. This cannot be done without sheer confiscation, which would be none the less confiscation because carried out gradually and under the guise of taxation.

The problem has, however, to be faced. Either we must submit for ever to hand over at least one-third of our annual product to those who do us the favor to own our country, without the obligation of rendering any service to the community, and to see this tribute augment with every advance in our industry and numbers, or else we must take steps, as considerably as may be possible, to put an end to this state of things. Nor does equity yield any such conclusive objection to the latter course. Even if the infant children of our proprietors have come into the world booted and spurred, it can scarcely be contended that whole generations of their descendants yet unborn have a vested interest to ride on the backs of whole generations of unborn workers. Few persons will believe that this globe must spin round the sun for ever charged with the colossal mortgage implied by private ownership of the ground-rents of great cities, merely because a few generations of mankind, over a small part of its area, could at first devise no better plan of appropriating its surface.

There is, indeed, much to be said in favor of the liberal treatment of the present generation of proprietors, and even of their children. But against the permanent welfare of the community the unborn have no rights; and not even a living proprietor can possess a vested interest in the existing system of taxation. The democracy may be trusted to find, in dealing with the landlord, that the resources of civilization are not exhausted. An increase in the death duties, the steady rise of local rates, the special taxation of urban ground values, the graduation and differentiation of the income-tax, the simple appropriation of the unearned increment, and the gradual acquire-

ment of land and other monopolies by public authorities, will in due course suffice to "collectivize" the bulk of the tribute of rent and interest in a way which the democracy will regard as sufficiently equitable even if it does not satisfy the conscience of the proprietary class itself. This growth of collective ownership it is, and not any vain sharing out of property, which is to achieve the practical equality of opportunity at which democracy aims.

Why Inequality is Bad.

Individualists have been driven, in their straits, to argue that inequality in wealth is in itself a good thing, and that the objection to it arises from the vain worship of a logical abstraction. But Socialists (who on this point are but taking up the old Radical position) base their indictment against inequality, not on any metaphysical grounds, but on the plain facts of its effect upon social life. The inequality of income at the present time obviously results in a flagrant "wrong production" of commodities. The unequal value of money to our paupers and our millionaires deprives the test of "effective demand" of all value as an index to social requirements, or even to the production of individual happiness. The last glass of wine at a plutocratic orgy, which may be deemed not even to satisfy any desire, is economically as urgently "demanded" as the whole day's maintenance of the dock laborer for which its cost would suffice. Whether London shall be provided with an Italian Opera, or with two Italian Operas, whilst a million of its citizens are without the means of decent life, is now determined, not with any reference to the genuine social needs of the capital of the world, or even by any comparison between the competing desires of its inhabitants, but by the chance vagaries of a few hundred wealthy families. It will be hard for the democracy to believe that the conscious public appropriation of municipalized rent would not result in a better adjustment of resources to needs, or, at any rate, in a more general satisfaction of individual desires, than this Individualist appropriation of personal tribute on the labors of others.

The Degradation of Character.

A more serious result of the inequality of income caused by the private ownership of land and capital is its evil effect on human character and the multiplication of the race. It is not easy to compute the loss to the world's progress, the degradation of the world's art and literature, caused by the demoralization of excessive wealth. Equally difficult would it be to reckon up how many potential geniuses are crushed out of existence by lack of opportunity of training and scope. But a graver evil is the positive "wrong-population" which is the result of extreme poverty and its accompanying insensibility to all but the lowest side of human life. In a condition of society in which the *average* family income is but a little over £3 per week, the deduction of rent and interest for the benefit of a small class necessarily implies a vast majority of the population below the level of decent existence. The slums at the

East End of London are the corollary of the mansions at the West End. The depression of the worker to the product of the margin of cultivation often leaves him nothing but the barest livelihood. No prudential considerations appeal to such a class. One consequence is the breeding in the slums of our great cities, and the overcrowded hovels of the rural poor, of a horde of semi-barbarians, whose unskilled labor is neither required in our present complex industrial organism, nor capable of earning a maintenance there. It was largely the recognition that it was hopeless to expect to spread a Malthusian prudence among this residuum that turned John Stuart Mill into a Socialist; and if this solution be rejected, the slums remain to the Individualist as the problem of the Sphinx, which his civilization must solve or perish.

The Loss of Freedom.

It is less easy to secure adequate recognition of the next, and in many respects the most serious "difficulty" of Individualism—namely, its inconsistency with democratic self-government. The Industrial Revolution with its splendid conquests over Nature, opened up a new avenue of personal power for the middle class, and for every one who could force his way into the ranks either of the proprietors of the new machines, or of the captains of industry whom they necessitated. The enormous increase in personal power thus gained by a comparatively small number of persons, they and the economists not unnaturally mistook for a growth in general freedom. Nor was this opinion wholly incorrect. The industrial changes were, in a sense, themselves the result of progress in political liberty. The feudal restrictions and aristocratic tyranny of the eighteenth century gave way before the industrial spirit, and the politically free laborer came into existence. But the economic servitude of the worker did not disappear with his political bondage. With the chains of innate status there dropped off also its economic privileges, and the free laborer found himself in a community where the old common rights over the soil were being gradually but effectually extinguished. He became a landless stranger in his own country. The development of competitive production for sale in the world market, and the supremacy of the machine industry, involved moreover, in order to live, not merely access to the land, but the use, in addition, of increasingly large masses of capital—at first in agriculture, then foreign trade, then in manufacture, and finally now also in distributive industries. The mere worker became steadily less and less industrially independent as his political freedom increased. From a self-governing producing unit, he passed into a mere item in a vast industrial army over the organization and direction of which he had no control. He was free, but free only to choose to which master he would sell his labor—free only to decide from which proprietor he would beg that access to the new instruments of production without which he could not exist.

In an age of the Small Industry there was much to be said for the view that the greatest possible personal freedom was to be

obtained by the least possible collective rule. The peasant on his own farm, the blacksmith at his own forge, needed only to be let alone to be allowed to follow their own individual desires as to the manner and duration of their work. But the organization of workers into huge armies, the directing of the factory and the warehouse by skilled generals and captains, which is the inevitable outcome of the machine industry and the world-commerce, have necessarily deprived the average workman of the direction of his own life or the management of his own work. The middle class student, over whose occupation the Juggernaut Car of the Industrial Revolution has not passed, finds it difficult to realize how sullenly the workman resents his exclusion from all share in the direction of the industrial world. This feeling is part of the real inwardness of the demand for an Eight Hours Bill.

The ordinary journalist or member of Parliament still says: "I don't consult any one except my doctor as to my hours of labor. That is a matter which each grown man must settle for himself." We never hear such a remark from a working man belonging to any trade more highly organized than chimney-sweeping. The modern artisan has learnt that he can no more fix for himself the time at which he shall begin and end his work than he can fix the sunrise or the tides. When the carrier drove his own cart and the weaver sat at his own loom they began and left off work at the hours that each preferred. Now the railway worker or the power-loom weaver knows that he must work the same hours as his mates.

It was this industrial autocracy that the Christian Socialists of 1850 sought to remedy by re-establishing the "self-governing workshop" of associated craftsmen; and a similar purpose still pervades the whole field of industrial philanthropy. Sometimes it takes the specious name of "industrial partnership"; sometimes the less pretentious form of a joint-stock company with one-pound shares. In the country it inspires the zeal for the creation of peasant proprietorships, or the restoration of "village industries," and behind it stalk those bogus middle class "reforms" known as "free land" and "leasehold enfranchisement." But it can scarcely be hidden from the eyes of any serious student of economic evolution that all these well-meant endeavors to set back the industrial clock are, as regards any widespread result, foredoomed to failure.

The growth of capital has been so vast, and is so rapidly increasing, that any hope of the great mass of the workers ever owning under any conceivable Individualist arrangements the instruments of production with which they work can only be deemed chimerical.*

* The estimated value of the wealth of the United Kingdom to-day is 10,000 millions sterling, or over £1,100 per family. The co-operative movement controls about 13 millions sterling. The total possessions of the 31 millions of the wage-earning class are less than 250 millions sterling, or not £7 capital per family. The eight millions of the population who do not belong to the wage-earning class own all the rest; the death duty returns show, indeed, that one-half of the entire total is in the hands of about 25,000 families. For references to the authorities for these and other statistics quoted, see Fabian Tract No. 5, *Facts for Socialists*.

Hence it is that irresponsible personal authority over the actions of others—expelled from the throne, the castle, and the altar—still reigns, almost unchecked, in the factory and the mine. The “captains of industry,” like the kings of yore, are indeed honestly unable to imagine how the business of the world can ever go on without the continuance of their existing rights and powers. And truly, upon any possible development of Individualistic principles, it is not easy to see how the worker can ever escape from their “beneficent” rule.

The Growth of Collective Action.

But representative government has taught the people how to gain collectively that power which they could never again individually possess. The present century has accordingly witnessed a growing demand for the legal regulation of the conditions of industry which represents a marked advance on previous conceptions of the sphere of legislation. It has also seen a progress in the public management of industrial undertakings which represents an equal advance in the field of government administration. Such an extension of collective action is, it may safely be asserted, an inevitable result of political democracy. When the Commons of England had secured the right to vote supplies, it must have seemed an unwarrantable extension that they should claim also to redress grievances. When they passed from legislation to the exercise of control over the executive, the constitutional jurists were aghast at the presumption. The attempt of Parliament to seize the command of the military forces led to a civil war. Its control over foreign policy is scarcely two hundred years old. Every one of these developments of the collective authority of the nation over the conditions of its own life was denounced as an illegitimate usurpation foredoomed to failure. Every one of them is still being resisted in countries less advanced in political development. In England, where all these rights are admitted, each of them inconsistent with the “complete personal liberty” of the minority, the Individualists of to-day deny the competence of the people to regulate, through their representative committees, national or local, the conditions under which they work and live. Although the tyranny which keeps the tramcar conductor away from his home for seventeen hours a day is not the tyranny of king or priest or noble, he feels that it is tyranny all the same, and seeks to curb it in the way his fathers took.

The captains of war have been reduced to the position of salaried officers acting for public ends under public control; and the art of war has not decayed. In a similar way the captains of industry are gradually being deposed from their independent commands, and turned into salaried servants of the public. Nearly all the railways of the world, outside of America and the United Kingdom, are managed in this way. The Belgian Government works its own line of passenger steamers. The Paris Municipal Council opens public bakeries. The Glasgow Town Council runs its own common lodging houses, Plymouth its own tramways. Everywhere, schools, water

works, gas-works, dwellings for the people, and many other forms of capital, are passing from individual into collective control. And there is no contrary movement. No community which has once "municipalized" any public service ever retraces its steps or reverses its action.

Such is the answer that is actually being given to this difficulty of Individualism. Everywhere the workman is coming to understand that it is practically hopeless for him, either individually or co-operatively, to own the constantly growing mass of capital by the use of which he lives. Either we must, under what is called "complete personal freedom," acquiesce in the personal rule of the capitalist, tempered only by enlightened self-interest and the "gift of sympathy," or we must substitute for it, as we did for the royal authority, the collective rule of the whole community. The decision is scarcely doubtful. And hence we have on all sides, what to the Individualist is the most incomprehensible of phenomena, the expansion of the sphere of government in the interests of liberty itself. Socialism is, indeed, nothing but the extension of democratic self-government from the political to the industrial world, and it is hard to resist the conclusion that it is an inevitable outcome of the joint effects of the economic and political revolutions of the past century.

Competition.

Individualists often take refuge in a faith that the extension of the proprietary class, and the competition of its members, will always furnish an adequate safeguard against the tyranny of any one of them. But the monopoly of which the democracy is here impatient is not that of any single individual, but that of the class itself. What the workers are objecting to is, not the rise of any industrial Buonaparte financially domineering the whole earth—though American experience makes even this less improbable than it once was—but the creation of a new feudal system of industry, the domination of the mass of ordinary workers by a hierarchy of property owners, who compete, it is true, among themselves, but who are nevertheless able, as a class, to preserve a very real control over the lives of those who depend upon their own daily labor.

Moreover, competition, where it still exists, is in itself one of the Individualist's difficulties, resulting, under a system of unequal incomes, not merely in the production, as we have seen, of the wrong commodities, but also of their production in the wrong way and for the wrong ends. The whole range of the present competitive Individualism manifestly tends, indeed, to the glorification, not of honest personal service, but of the pursuit of personal gain—not the production of wealth, but the obtaining of riches. The inevitable outcome is the apotheosis, not of social service, but of successful financial speculation, which is already the special bane of the American civilization. With it comes inevitably a demoralization of personal character, a coarsening of moral fibre, and a hideous lack of taste.

The Lesson of Evolution.

This, indeed, is the lesson which economics brings to ethics. The "fittest to survive" is not necessarily the best, but much more probably he who takes the fullest possible advantage of the conditions of the struggle, heedless of the result to his rivals. Indeed, the social consequences of complete personal liberty in the struggle for existence have been so appalling that the principle has had necessarily to be abandoned. It is now generally admitted to be a primary duty of government to prescribe the plane on which it will allow the struggle for existence to be fought out, and so to determine which kind of fitness shall survive. We have long ruled out of the conflict the appeal to brute force, thereby depriving the stronger man of his natural advantage over his weaker brother. We stop as fast as we can every development of fraud and chicanery, and so limit the natural right of the cunning to overreach their neighbors. We prohibit the weapon of deceptive labels and trade marks. In spite of John Bright's protest, we rule that adulteration is not a permissible form of competition. We forbid slavery: with Mill's consent, we even refuse to enforce a lifelong contract of service. We condemn long hours of labor for women and children, and now even for adult men, and insanitary conditions of labor for all workers.

The whole history of social progress is, indeed, one long series of definitions and limitations of the conditions of the struggle, in order to raise the quality of the fittest who survive. This service can be performed only by the government. No individual competitor can lay down the rules of the combat. No individual can safely choose the higher plane so long as his opponent is at liberty to fight on the lower. In the face of this experience, the Individualist proposal to rely on complete personal liberty and free competition is not calculated to gain much acceptance. A social system devised to encourage "the art of establishing the maximum inequality over our neighbors"—as Ruskin puts it—appears destined to be replaced, wherever this is possible, by one based on salaried public service, with the stimulus of duty and esteem, instead of that of fortune-making.

The Struggle for Existence between Nations.

But perhaps the most serious difficulty presented by the present concentration of energy upon personal gain is its effect upon the position of the community in the race struggle. The lesson of evolution seems to be that interracial competition is really more momentous in its consequences than the struggle between individuals. It is of comparatively little importance, in the long run, that individuals should develop to the utmost, if the life of the community in which they live is not thereby served. Two generations ago it would have been assumed, as a matter of course, that the most efficient life for each community was to be secured by each individual in it being left complete personal freedom. But that

crude vision has long since been demolished. Fifty years' social experience have convinced every statesman that, although there is no common sensorium, a society is something more than the sum of its members; that a social organism has a life and health distinguishable from those of its individual atoms. Hence it is that we have had Lord Shaftesbury warning us that without Factory Acts we should lose our textile trade; Matthew Arnold, that without national education we were steering straight into national decay; and finally even Professor Huxley taking up the parable that, unless we see to the training of our residuum, France and Germany and the United States will take our place in the world's workshop. This "difficulty" of Individualism can be met, indeed, like the rest, only by the application of what are essentially Socialist principles.

Argument and Class Bias.

These "difficulties" will appeal more strongly to some persons than to others. The evils of inequality of wealth will come home more forcibly to the three millions of the submerged tenth in want of the bare necessities of life than they will to the small class provided with every luxury at the cost of the rest. The ethical objection to any diminution in the incomes of those who own our land will vary in strength according, in the main, to our economic or political prepossessions. The indiscriminate multiplication of the unfit, like the drunkenness of the masses, will appear as a cause or an effect of social inequality according to our actual information about the poor, and our disposition towards them. The luxury of the rich may strike us as a sign either of national wealth or of national maladjustment of resources to needs. The autocratic administration of industry will appear either as the beneficent direction of the appropriate captains of industry, or as the tyranny of a proprietary class over those who have no alternative but to become its wage-slaves. The struggle of the slaves among themselves, of the proprietors among themselves, and of each class with the other, may be to us "the beneficent private war which makes one man strive to climb on the shoulders of another, and remain there;"* or it may loom to us, out of the blood and tears and misery of the strife, as a horrible remnant of the barbarism from which man has half risen since

"We dined, as a rule, on each other :
What matter ? the toughest survived."

That survival from an obsolescent form or the struggle for existence may seem the best guarantee for the continuance of the community and the race; or it may, on the other hand, appear a suicidal internecine conflict, as fatal as that between the belly and the members. All through the tale two views are possible, and we shall take the one or the other according to our knowledge and temperament.

* Sir Henry Maine, *Popular Government*, pp. 49, 50.

This power of prepossession and unconscious bias constitutes, indeed, the special difficulty of the Individualists of to-day. Aristotle found it easy to convince himself and his friends that slavery was absolutely necessary to civilization. The Liberty and Property Defence League has the more difficult task of convincing, not the proprietary class, but our modern slaves, who are electors and into whose control the executive power of the community is more and more falling. And in this task the Individualists receive ever less and less help from the chief executive officers of the nation. Those who have forced directly upon their notice the larger aspects of the problem, those who are directly responsible for the collective interests of the community, can now hardly avoid, whether they like it or not, taking the Socialist view. Each Minister of State protests against Socialism in the abstract, but every decision that he gives in his own department leans more and more away from the Individualist side.

Socialism and Liberty.

Some persons may object that this gradual expansion of the collective administration of the nation's life cannot fairly be styled a Socialistic development, and that the name ought to be refused to everything but a complete system of society on a Communist basis. But whatever Socialism may have meant in the past its real significance now is the steady expansion of representative self-government into the industrial sphere. This industrial democracy it is, and not any ingenious Utopia, with which Individualists, if they desire to make any effectual resistance to the substitution of collective for individual will, must attempt to deal. Most political students are, indeed, now prepared to agree with the Socialist that our restrictive laws and municipal Socialism, so far as these have yet gone, do, as a matter of fact, secure a greater well-being and general freedom than that system of complete personal liberty, of which the "sins of legislators" have deprived us. The sacred name of liberty is invoked, by both parties, and the question at issue is merely one of method. As each "difficulty" of the present social order presents itself for solution, the Socialist points to the experience of all advanced industrial countries, and urges that personal freedom can be obtained by the great mass of the people only by their substituting democratic self-government in the industrial world for that personal power which the Industrial Revolution has placed in the hands of the proprietary class. His opponents regard individual liberty as inconsistent with collective control, and accordingly resist any extension of this "higher freedom" of collective life. Their main difficulty is the advance of democracy, ever more and more claiming to extend itself into the field of industry. To all objections, fears, doubts, and difficulties, as to the practicability of doing in the industrial what has already been done in the political world, the democratic answer is "*solvitur ambulando*;" only that is done at any time which is proved to be then and there practicable; only such advance is made as the progress in the sense of public duty permits. But that progress is both our hope

and our real aim : the development of individual character is the Socialist's "odd trick" for the sake of which he seeks to win all others.

Industrial democracy must therefore necessarily be gradual in its development ; and cannot for long ages be absolutely complete. The time may never arrive, even as regards material things, when individual is entirely merged in collective ownership or control, but it is matter of common observation that every attempt to grapple with the "difficulties" of our existing civilization brings us nearer to that goal.

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The Fabian Society consists of Socialists.

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
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