

CHAPTER I

THE OUTLOOK

To the thoughtful mind the outlook at the close of the nineteenth century is profoundly interesting. History can furnish no parallel to it. The problems which loom across the threshold of the new century surpass in magnitude any that civilisation has hitherto had to encounter. We seem to have reached a time in which there is abroad in men's minds an instinctive feeling that a definite stage in the evolution of Western civilisation is drawing to a close, and that we are entering on a new era. Yet one of the most curious features of the time is the almost complete absence of any clear indication from those who speak in the name of science and authority as to the direction in which the path of future progress lies. On every side in those departments of knowledge which deal with social affairs change, transition, and uncertainty are apparent. Despite the great advances which science has made during the past century in almost every other direction, there is, it must be confessed, no science of human society properly so called. What knowledge there is exists in a more or less chaotic state scattered under many heads; and it is not improbably true, however much we may hesitate to

acknowledge it, that the generalisations which have recently tended most to foster a conception of the unity underlying the laws operating amid the complex social phenomena of our time, have not been those which have come from the orthodox scientific school. They have rather been those advanced by that school of social revolutionists of which Karl Marx is the most commanding figure. Judged by the utterances of her spokesmen, science, whose great triumph in the nineteenth century has been the tracing of the steps in the evolution of life up to human society, stands now dumb before the problems presented by society as it exists around us. As regards its further evolution she appears to have no clear message.

In England we have a most remarkable example of the attitude of science when she is appealed to for aid and enlightenment in those all-engrossing problems with which society is struggling. One of the monumental works of our time is the "Synthetic Philosophy" of Mr. Herbert Spencer begun early in the second half of the century, and not yet completed. It is a stupendous attempt not only at the unification of knowledge, but at the explanation in terms of evolutionary science of the development which human society is undergoing, and towards the elucidation of which development it is rightly recognised that all the work of science in lower fields should be preliminary. Yet so little practical light has the author apparently succeeded in throwing on the nature of the social problems of our time, that his investigations and conclusions are, according as they are dealt with by one side or the other, held to lead up to the opinions of the two diametrically opposite camps of individualists and collectivists into which society is slowly becoming organised.

From Mr. Herbert Spencer in England, who himself regards the socialistic tendencies of the times with dislike if not with alarm, and whose views are thus shared by some and opposed by others of his own followers, to Professor Schäffle in Germany, who regards the future as belonging to purified socialism, we have every possible and perplexing variety of opinion. The negative and helpless position of science is fairly exemplified in England by Professor Huxley, who in some of his recent writings has devoted himself to reducing the aims of the two conflicting parties of the day—individualists and socialists—to absurdity and impossibility respectively. These efforts are not, however, to be regarded as preliminary to an attempt to inspire us with any clear idea as to where our duty lies in the circumstances. After this onslaught his own faith in the future grows obscure, and he sends his readers on their way with, for guiding principle, no particular faith or hope in anything.¹

Yet that the times are pregnant of great changes the least observant must be convinced. Even those who indulge in these destructive criticisms seem to be conscious of this. Professor Huxley himself, despite his negative conclusions, is almost as outspoken as a Nihilist in his dissatisfaction with the existing state of things. “Even the best of modern civilisations,” said he recently, “appears to me to exhibit a condition of mankind which neither embodies any worthy ideal nor even possesses the merit of stability. I do not hesitate to express the opinion that if there is no hope of a large improvement of the condition of the greater part of the human family ;

¹ See his “Government: Anarchy or Regimentation,” *Nineteenth Century*, May 1890. See also his *Social Diseases and Worse Remedies*, pp. 13-51.

if it is true that the increase of knowledge, the winning of a greater dominion over nature which is its consequence, and the wealth which follows upon that dominion are to make no difference in the extent and the intensity of want with its concomitant physical and moral degradation amongst the masses of the people, I should hail the advent of some kindly comet which would sweep the whole affair away as a desirable consummation.”¹ It is the large body of thought which this kind of feeling inspires which is now stirring European society to its depths, and nothing is more certain than that it will have to be reckoned with. M. de Laveleye, a few years ago, put the feeling into words. The message of the eighteenth century to man was, he said, “Thou shalt cease to be the slave of nobles and despots who oppress thee; thou art free and sovereign.” But the problem of our times is: “It is a grand thing to be free and sovereign, but how is it that the sovereign often starves? how is it that those who are held to be the source of power often cannot, even by hard work, provide themselves with the necessaries of life?”² Mr. Henry George only fairly presses the matter home by asking whither in such circumstances our progress is leading; for, “to educate men who must be condemned to poverty is but to make them restive; to base on a state of most glaring social inequality political institutions under which men are theoretically equal is to stand a pyramid on its apex.”³

Those who wish to see the end of the present condition of society have, so far, taken most part in the argument.

¹ “Government: Anarchy or Regimentation,” by Professor Huxley, *Nineteenth Century*, May 1890.

² “Communism:” by Emile de Laveleye, *Contemporary Review*, March 1890.

³ *Progress and Poverty*, Introduction.

Those who have no desire for change are of the class which always waits for action rather than argument. But a large section of the community, probably the largest section, while remaining unconvinced by the arguments used and more or less distrusting the methods proposed, feel that some change is inevitable. It is with these will probably rest the decisive part in shaping the course of future events. But at present they simply sit still and wait. They have no indication as to the direction in which the right path lies. They look in vain to science and authority for any hint as to duty. They are without a faith, for there is at the present time no science of human society. Many of the spokesmen of science who concern themselves with social problems continue to speak and act as if they conceived that their duty to society was to take away its religious beliefs. But it is not that they have any faith of their own to offer instead; they apparently have themselves no grasp of the problems with which the world is struggling as best it can. Science has obviously herself no clear perception of the nature of the social evolution we are undergoing. She has made no serious attempt to explain the phenomenon of our Western civilisation. We are without any real knowledge of the laws of its life and development or of the principles which underlie the process of social evolution which is proceeding around us.¹

To many the spirit of the French Revolution which

¹ So far the larger part of the most useful work of the century in the department of sociology appears to have been merely destructive. "It may be stated," said Mr. Leslie Stephen recently, "that there is no science of sociology properly scientific—merely a heap of vague empirical observations, too flimsy to be useful in strict logical inference."—*Presidential Address, Annual Meeting of the Social and Political Education League, March 1892.*

caused so universal a feeling of unrest at the end of the last century seems to be again unloosed, and after an epoch of progress unexampled in the history of the world we would appear to have returned to the discussion of the ideals of society which moved men's minds at that period of upheaval. Nothing can, however, be more out of place than comparisons which are instituted between society one hundred years ago and at the present time. We have little in common with this past. It may be searched in vain for any clue to the solution of the problems which confront us in the future. The great political revolution which began one hundred years ago, and which has been in progress in England and on the Continent throughout the nineteenth century, has well-nigh attained its ends. The middle classes having succeeded in enfranchising themselves have been in turn driven to enfranchise the lower classes; and with the possession of universal education and universal suffrage, and the long list of measures tending the more fully to secure the political enfranchisement of the people which has accompanied them, this revolution is, to all intents, complete. We have in reality entered on a new stage of social evolution in which the minds of men are moving towards other goals; and those political parties which still stand confronting the people with remnants of the political programme of political equality are beginning to find that the world is rapidly moving beyond their standpoint.

In other directions, too, the changes have been vast. Since the beginning of the century applied science has transformed the world. Amongst the advanced nations, the great wave of industrial expansion which follows in its wake is slowly but inevitably submerging the old landmarks of society, and preparing for us a world

where the old things, material and social as well as political, have passed away, and in which the experience of the past is no longer a reliable guide. The marvellous development of practical science, the revolution in industry which it has effected, the application of steam and electricity on an immense scale to machinery, the enormous extension of railways, telegraphs, and other means of rapid communication, the development of commerce to a degree never before imagined, are amongst the wonders of the present age. They are only the earnest apparently of the future. Even a superficial acquaintance with the means and methods of modern science can hardly fail to leave the conviction that no limit can be set to the possibilities of even the near future, and that the achievements of the past, extraordinary as they have been, are not improbably destined to be eclipsed at no distant date.

But it is the more slowly ripening fruits of the industrial revolution which arrest attention. Social forces new, strange, and altogether immeasurable have been released among us. Only one hundred years ago, nations and communities were as distant from each other in time as they were at the Christian era. Since then the ends of the world have been drawn together, and civilised society is becoming one vast highly organised and inter-dependent whole—the wants and requirements of every part regulated by economic laws bewildering in their intricacy—with a nervous system of five million miles of telegraph wire, and an arterial system of railways and ocean steamships, along which the currents of trade and population flow with a rapidity and regularity previously unimagined. The old bonds of society have been loosened; old forces are becoming extinct; whole classes have been swept away, and new classes

have arisen. The great army of industrial workers throughout the world is almost entirely a growth of the past hundred years. Vast displacements of population have taken place, and are still taking place. The expansion of the towns, one of the most remarkable features of the industrial revolution, still continues unabated, no less in America and Australia than in England, Germany, and France; and civilisation is everywhere massing together, within limited areas, large populations extremely sensitive to innumerable social stimuli which did not exist at the beginning of the century. The air is full of new battle-cries, of the sound of the gathering and marshalling of new forces and the reorganisation of old ones. Socialism seems to many minds to have been born again, and to be entering on the positive and practical stage. It has ceased to be a theory, it has begun to be a kind of religion.

Nor does the new faith appear to be without its credentials and its aids to belief. It has, in the products of the times, a background as luridly effective as any which stirred the imagination of the early Christians in the days of degenerate Rome. We are told that the immense progress of the century and the splendid conquests of science have brought no corresponding gain to the masses. That, on the contrary, to the wage-earning class, which carries society on its shoulders, the century has been in many respects a period of progressive degeneration. That the labourer has ceased to be a man as nature made him; and that, ignorant of all else, he is only occupied with some small detail in the huge mill of industry. That even the skilled worker holds desperately to the small niche into which he has been fitted, knowing that to lose his place is to become part of the helpless flotsam and jetsam of

society, tossed to and fro on the tide of poverty and misery. The adherents of the new faith ask, What avails it that the waste places of the earth have been turned into highways of commerce, if the many still work and want, and only the few have leisure and grow rich? What does it profit the worker that knowledge grows, if all the appliances of science are not to lighten his labour? Wealth may accumulate, and public and private magnificence may have reached a point never before attained in the history of the world; but wherein is society the better, it is asked, if the Nemesis of poverty still sits like a hollow-eyed spectre at the feast? The wheels of the world go round quicker, for science stokes the furnace; but men work sullenly. A new patrician class, we are told, has arisen with all the power, but none of the character or the responsibilities of the old. We hear of the "robber knights of capital," and of the "unclean brigand aristocracy of the Stock Exchange." We are told that they who profit are the organisers who set the machine to work, who pull the levers, study its pulses, and know its wants. They divide and govern, and the world works that they may grow rich.

What wonder that with such a creed the new battle-cries have an ominous sound. We hear no longer of the privileged and the people, but of the idlers and the workers, the usurpers and the disinherited, the robbers and the robbed. Many who think that we have heard all this before, and who are relieved to remember that socialism is as old as Fourier, Robert Owen, and Louis Blanc, leave out of consideration what is an all-important factor at the present time. In England, when early in the century Robert Owen's theories were discussed, and

for long after, the working classes, it must be remembered, were almost without political rights of any kind. They lived like brutes, huddled together in wretched dwellings, without education and without any voice in politics or in the management of public affairs. Since then all this has gradually been changed. One of the most striking and significant signs of the times is the spectacle of Demos, with these new battle-cries ringing in his ears, gradually emerging from the long silence of social and political serfdom. Not now does he come with the violence of revolution foredoomed to failure, but with the slow and majestic progress which marks a natural evolution. He is no longer unwashed and illiterate, for we have universal education. He is no longer muzzled and without political power, for we have universal suffrage. With his advent, socialism has ceased to be a philanthropic sentiment merely. It still enlists the sympathies of many of the best minds, but it has become at the same time a direct appeal to the selfish instincts of a considerable portion of the community wielding political power.¹ The advent of Demos is the natural result of a long series of concessions, beginning in England with the passing of the Factory Acts, and the legalisation of combination, and leading gradually up to the avowedly socialistic legislation for which the times appear to be ripening.

But so far all the changes are said to have only increased the power without materially lessening the misery of the working classes; and the goal towards which all efforts are directed seems still far off. Science may be

¹ Communism, as M. de Laveleye very truly points out, tends to be specially attractive to two classes of men,—reformers and the workers. “The former are drawn to it by a sentiment of justice, the latter by their own necessities.”