

competition. Do you doubt it? Allow me to prove my statement by quoting from a speech by John Bright. John Bright was a great apostle of grad-grindery. He was a champion of competition, an opponent of the Factory Acts and trade unionism; and in the speech to which I allude he intended to excuse adulteration, and he said:—

Adulteration is only another form of competition.

Could anything be clearer? Could any irony, or any argument, or any invective of a Socialist, wound competition so deeply as does this maladroit chance-blow of its champion, John Bright?

I notice, Mr. Smith, that there is a statue of John Bright in the Town Hall Square of Manchester. That statue is well placed. John Bright was the natural hero of the cotton age. In our Merrie England we shall most likely prefer to put up memorials to men like John Ruskin and Thomas Carlyle.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST.

After a momentary silence spake
Some vessel of a more ungainly make;
They sneer at me for leaning all awry:
What! did the hand then of the Potter shake?

Omar Khayyám.

One of the favourite arguments of the Gradgrinds in support of competition is the theory of the Survival of the Fittest.

They say that those who fail, fail because they are not fitted to succeed. They say that those who succeed, succeed because they are "fit." They say it is the law of nature that the weakest shall go to the wall, and to the wall with them—and no quarter.

The slumites live in the slums because they are unfit to live anywhere else. The Duke of Marlborough lived in a palace because the intellectual and moral superiority of such a man naturally forced him into a palace.

Burns was a ploughman; Bunyan was a tinker; Lord Chesterfield was a peer. The composer of the popular waltz, "The Masher's Dream," makes ten thousand a year,

and lives in a mansion. Richard Jefferies and James Thomson died poor and neglected.

Jay Gould had boundless wealth and tremendous power. Walt Whitman had a modest competence, and no power at all. Or, as the most vivid example I can give you of the great law of the survival of the fittest, let me remind you that Brigham Young was a prophet and a ruler, wealthy and honoured; and that Christ lived a mendicant preacher, and died the death of a felon.

And all these things are justified by the glorious law that the fittest shall survive.

But let me give you my own explanation of the law as to the survival of the fittest. Of two plants or animals, that one will survive which is fittest to endure the conditions in which both exist. The question of which man shall survive depends upon the conditions under which the men shall struggle for survival.

According to the law of nature the man who is best suited by the conditions of the country and the society he lives in will be best fitted to succeed.

In a nation of marauders, then, who live by spoliation and the sword, the fittest to survive would be a different type of man from him who gets first place in a nation of traders, where fierceness and strength of arm are less called for than tenacity and clearness of head.

It thus appears that when we say our poor are poor because they are not fitted to gain wealth, we mean that they are not "fit" to gain wealth under the conditions of life now existing. But under different conditions of life they might succeed.

If, then, the present conditions of life in England are not right, the poor are wrong; but if the present conditions of life are not right, the poor are *wronged*.

Therefore, it seems that this theory of the Survival of the Fittest is no answer to our indictment against Society. It proves nothing except that if the poor are unworthy they are unworthy. The question are they unworthy, or is it the arrangement of Society that is unworthy, has still to be answered.

One condition of Society enables one kind of man to succeed. Another condition of society enables another kind

of man to succeed. Now would you say that was the best condition of society that gave to the lowest type of humanity the pre-eminence? Or would you say that was the best condition of society that gave the highest type of humanity the pre-eminence?

Granting that the noblest is really the most proper to survive, is it not desirable that the conditions of society should be so moulded and arranged that noble qualities shall have full play and base qualities be kept in check? I think that is clear enough, and I now ask you to consider whether society, as it is at present constituted, enables the law of the Survival of the Fittest to work for evil or for good.

For hundreds of ages we have been imprisoning, murdering, prosecuting, and starving our Brunos, our Pauls, our Socrates, our Raleighs, our Joans of Arc, and have heaped rewards and honours on our Alexanders, our Bonapartes, our Jay Goulds, our Rothschilds. Are we to go on for ever in the worship of usury and slaughter and intrigue? Are we still to make the basest the fittest to survive? To bless power above benevolence? Shall we never have done admiring and obeying our Brigham Youngs, nor crucifying our Christs, nor scorning those who follow Him, and such as He?

No sensible man would attempt to oppose a law of nature. *All* natural laws are right. *No* natural law can be resisted. But before we give to any law implicit obedience we shall be wise to examine its credentials. Natural laws we *must* obey. But don't let us mistake the hasty deductions of erring men for the unchanging and triumphant laws of Nature. Let us begin, in this case, by asking whether the law of prey, which seems to be a natural and inevitable statute among the brutes, has any right of jurisdiction in the courts of humanity. Is there any difference between man and the brutes? If there is a difference, in what does it consist?

We need not get into a subtle investigation on this matter. It is sufficient to use common terms, and say that man has intellect; animals only instinct. Consider the consequences of this difference. We have spoken and written language, which beasts have not. We have imagination, which beasts have not. We have memory,

history, sciences, religions, which beasts have not. And we have intellectual progress, which beasts have not. I might go a great deal deeper into this matter, but I want to keep to plain speech and simple issues. Man has *reason*; beasts have not.

Now reason is a natural thing in man. Nature gave him reason, because reason is necessary to the working out of his development, and I mean to say that by reason we are to be guided, and not by the law of prey, which is a natural check and balance put upon unreasoning creatures. By how much a man's reason excels a brute's instincts is the man better than the brute. By how much one man's reason excels that of his fellows is he better than they. By how much any policy of human affairs is more reasonable than another policy is it best fitted to survive.

It seems, then, that the law of the Survival of the Fittest does apply to mankind; but it works with them in a manner different to that in which it works with the brutes. Well, I say that our Gradgrinds apply a natural law in an unnatural manner. That they would rule mankind by brutal methods.

Before we go any further with this theory of the Survival of the Fittest, let me ask you one question. Will you tell me, Mr. Smith, who *are* the fittest to survive? A great deal depends upon our answer to that question. All wealth is got by plunder. If instead of making laws to stop the depredations of the sweater we repealed the laws for the repression of the garrotter, we should soon fall into anarchy—that is, into a state of savagery, such as is understood by the word anarchy. The race to the swift. The battle to the strong. The weak to the wall. The vanquished to the sword. A perfect realisation of the Survival of the Fittest. Then the man with the most strength and ferocity would take by force of arms the goods of the weak and timid—and their lives. Which all of us would call sheer plunder. But commercialism is just a war of wits—a gambling or fighting with weapons of parchment and the like, and really plunder by force of cunning instead of by force of arms. And *both* these forms of plunder are forms in which the baser intellect and the more brutal physique will always be successful. In personal conflict, Socrates would be no

match for J. L. Sullivan; in commerce, Jesus Christ would be exploited by Jay Gould—as he *was*, in fact, by Judas.

For the Gradgrinds to invoke the laws of Nature is odd. Our “Survival-of-the-Fittest” men declare their dependence on the laws of Nature, and when anyone suggests a change in English laws and customs for the sake of the poor and heavy-laden, these barbarian ranters answer, “Oh, no. You must not meddle with the laws of Nature. Nature’s processes are inevitable, and cannot be altered by acts of Parliament.” But we *have* laws, and these wiseacres would keep those laws. If we suggested that no laws should be, they would call us anarchists. But what shall we call them who cry out that natural law is the only law, and yet insist upon the necessity for human laws as well?

Is there any natural obstacle to the establishment of a community on just terms? Is there any known law of nature that denies bread to the industrious and forces wealth upon the idle? If a natural law makes waste and want imperative, what is that law? Tell me, that I may know it? Natural law as far as I *do* know it is against this unjust distribution. Natural law punishes gluttony, and as ruthlessly punishes privation. Nature racks the gourmand and the sluggard with gout, or disfigures him with dropsy, and the starveling and the unresting drudge she visits with consumption and with pestilence. She strikes the miser with a Midas curse—turning his bowels to gold, and she brands the drunkard, the libertine, and the brawler with the mark of the beast. Nature everywhere ordains *temperance*. How, then, can wealth or indulgences be justified in her name. How can we say that the millions of poor slain by unnatural conditions of life are the victims of nature’s laws?

To whose interest is it that the poor should suffer? Do their sorrow and travail confer an atom of benefit on any of God’s creatures? Injustice is a thing accursed. It does not, never did, and never will confer a benefit on any man. The man who does an injustice suffers for it in his moral nature. He gains nothing, though he makes wealth. For no man can use more than he needs, and Justice would give all men that. The men to whom an injustice is done suffer, and be they many or few, Society suffers because of their suffering.

The Survival of the Fittest is a question of conditions. It can have no great power in the England of to-day. The Survival of the Fittest is another name for Anarchy. Our Society is one bound by law. The unfettered "right of individual enterprise" is anarchy. And it is bad. It is bad because in a state of social warfare, warfare to extermination point, the basest and the vilest have the advantage, for the vile man and the base will fight with less ruth and fewer scruples.

So much for the survival of the fittest. So much for *Laissez Faire*. The man who accepts the *Laissez Faire* doctrine would allow his garden to run wild, so that the roses might fight it out with the weeds and the fittest might survive.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOCIALISM AND PROGRESS.

Your present system of education is to get a rascal of an architect to order a rascal of a clerk-of-the-works to order a parcel of rascally bricklayers to build you a bestially stupid building in the middle of the town, poisoned with gas, and with an iron floor which will drop you all through it some frosty evening; wherein you will bring a puppet of a cockney lecturer in a dress coat and a white tie, to tell you smugly there's no God, and how many messes he can make of a lump of sugar.—*Ruskin*.

Another stock argument against Socialism is the assertion that it would destroy all intellectual progress. Here is a quotation from an article by the late Charles Bradlaugh:—

I object to Socialism because it would destroy the incentives which have produced, amongst other things, the "clever" men who serve society in various fashions, as doctors, engineers, architects, and teachers. I am inclined to doubt whether, if the enormous army of Socialist officials were rewarded at the like rate with the scavenger and the ploughman, the temptation on them might not be very great to help themselves to extra recompense from the national stores.

The first sentence in this passage displays a singular misconception of human nature; the second a grotesque misconception of Socialism.

We will dispose of the second sentence first. You will observe that Mr. Bradlaugh spoke of "the enormous army of Socialist officials." He seems to have supposed, as so many