

## CHAPTER III.

### LOOKING BACKWARD.

THERE cannot possibly be any reasonable doubt that the great multitude of evils that form so dark a blot on our civilisation, and contrast so strangely with our professed Christianity, originate in the laws we ourselves have made. The mere assertion of that truth, however, will not carry conviction to minds inclined to oppose it. For their sake it is needful to look back to their beginning, and follow up the causes of these evils from their origin to their effects.

Looking backward, then, through the almost forgotten pages of our history, we find that many of our present laws are founded on the ancient Roman system. Upon this ours has gradually been built up, as the years rolled by, modifying or amalgamating with the customs of the past and its traditions, until now we have a mass of unintelligible, obsolete, and contradictory statutes, some of which are founded on the legislation of an alien and barbarous race; others have arisen out of the amorphous methods of rough and ready justice practised by our forefathers; while others acknowledge a no more illustrious ancestry than the simple customs and traditions of a bygone age. These may have

been suitable enough to the requirements of primitive peoples; but our circumstances have changed, and have become complicated into almost inextricable confusion, because we have adopted the bad, and rejected or forgotten the good provisions they contained.

The lawmakers to whom we are indebted for our present system, laid down a pernicious fundamental principle to begin with, in adopting, as the base of all their legislation, the maxim of some long-forgotten heathen philosopher, that—"The highest aim of the true statesman is to secure the greatest good to the greatest number." This has come down through the ages to our own legislators, who have accepted it as a sound and solid truth, fit to sustain the shocks of time and stand firm for ever. By it they test every proposition, on it they have rested every measure they have passed, and so have raised a pretentious structure, of which they speak as "the Majesty of the Law," and assert, with equal self-complacency, "the Law is the perfection of reason." As if it were possible that every man should at all times be able to judge correctly what measures are best calculated to promote "the greatest good of the greatest number," and also to know by intuition what measures their wisdom has made into law, what they have changed and repealed, and what actions are required or forbidden by conflicting and contradictory statutes, they assume that "Every man should know the Law,"

holding none excused for mere ignorance, but punishing all offenders with rigid severity.

Yet it is very well known that the judges, whose *duty* it is to know and administer the Law, are often unable to enlighten us on these points.

They have thus raised up in untrained minds what they call "a wholesome fear of the Law," composed partly of terror inspired by its relentless power, and partly of dread of its blind stupidity; but containing no particle of reverence for its goodness, for which there are good and sufficient reasons.

Lawmakers and lawyers alike pay themselves a most undeserved compliment, and give themselves credit for strict justice and impartiality when they assert that "the Law is no respecter of persons," and that "in the eye of the Law all men are equal." Yet the very fundamental maxim on which the Law stands indicates, while it ignores the injury inflicted upon some, and the unjust preference shown to others in order that the good of "the greatest number" may be secured. And if all men were equal before it, then the right of one would be maintained as forcibly as the right of a multitude, and the right of a poor man as vigorously as that of a rich man, who is able to pay the extortionate demands of the Law's administrators.

The very root of all our legislation is thus proved to be rotten, and the fruit it bears sustains its character. For this our legislators rejected the grand fundamental maxim given us by the Saviour himself,

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“Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” and also the divine law based upon that maxim “Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you.”

Setting aside, as of no value to them, these Christian precepts that would manifestly promote the good of *all* and injure *none*, they have built on the heathen sage's maxim as the surer and safer foundation. We continue to do the same, as if Law and Christianity could have no aim in common, but must always oppose and nullify each other.

With this idea understood, but not expressed, we have rejected the wise and just foundation, and have raised an injurious system on a pernicious fallacy, impiously laying the evil results of our own folly to the charge of the Creator of the universe.

The evil principle we have thus taken to our bosoms taints not our legislation only, but our modes of thought and action, and affects our inner lives to so great an extent that we have become saturated with its vicious selfishness, regarding with complacency whatever brings profit to ourselves ; with indifference the suffering it may cause to others.

Hence it follows that measures, intended to confer a material benefit on a majority, while confessedly injuring a minority of the people, *must* always work a moral injury to the whole—to the benefited majority by inculcating a callous selfishness which esteems their own gain as the reward of superior merit, and the others' loss as a well-deserved punishment—to the

injured minority by cultivating feelings of envy and discontent arising out of their perception of the unjust distribution of benefits, and the unmerited injuries inflicted upon themselves. Not always able to trace these to their true source, they soon begin to think themselves the sport of an unfeeling Providence punishing them for they know not what. So the evil spreads in ever-widening circles, sapping the very foundations of their faith in a beneficent Creator and Ruler of the universe, and leaving them to fight the battles of life without a true principle to guide them, or a hope to brighten their lot.

Then begins to be felt the reaction of this moral injury as it affects the material welfare of the whole community, retarding their progress, and punishing them for their rejection of the truth with an ever-increasing amount of vice, crime and grinding poverty, and the thousand other evils that disgrace and degrade us.

Thus, looking backward to the foundation of our system, and taking a broad view of the condition of things resting on that foundation, we see enough to uphold the contention that we are responsible for all the evils that make the misery of our lives.

If we look more closely and examine the circumstances under which these ills affect us, we can scarcely discover any that are not ultimately traceable to our deliberate encouragement of the growth of evil by basing our legislation on a false and vicious

heathen maxim, as full of curses in experience as of blessing in promise, although we had the choice of cultivating every good principle by acting upon the precepts of the Saviour.

At the present time the evil most prominent in all the most civilised nations of the world is the dispute incessantly raging between employers and employed, than which, perhaps, no secondary cause is more fruitful of harm to the moral and material welfare of the nations involved.

Let us select this for examination, and ask ourselves, "What is the cause of this fearful national scourge?"

It is frequently spoken of as "the dispute between Capital and Labour," but, since Capital is merely a product of Labour, and represents nothing but Labour, there can no more be a dispute between them than there can be a battle between a man and his shadow. A large Capital represents the concentrated Labour of many hands, and when gathered into the possession of one individual, it gives to him the same power as would the control of the hands which produced it. If he make no attempt to exercise that power, it is obvious that his Capital can never in any way come into collision with Labour. Whence it is clear that disputes can only arise when Capital is being used, and they come, not out of any relation between Capital and Labour, but out of that about which they are employed.

That this is the point at which the conflict begins

will become apparent if we take, for example, a coal mine at work.

If the mine belongs to the labourers who work it, and the Capital to others, the whole product, after providing for the repayment of the Capital, would belong to Labour, and there could be no dispute.

If the ownership rests with the owner of the Capital, it is that fact, and not the possession of Capital, whether £1 or £1,000,000, which gives rise to disputes.

If the owner of the mine borrowed the Capital to pay for and work it, no dispute is possible between that Capital and the Labour employed, for the real owner of the Capital stands altogether clear of it, whilst the owner of the mine controls both the Capital and the Labour. If, then, a dispute arise it can only be between him, as owner of the mine, and the Labour he employs.

Hence we may clearly infer that in all cases the quarrel lies between Labour and the owner of the opportunity for employing Labour, whether mine, dock, factory, or any other thing about which Labour may be employed. Capital, great or small, has no part in the origin of the dispute, though it gives more or less support to its owner when a dispute has arisen; it also confers the power of securing possession of opportunities for the profitable employment of Labour. Until such an opportunity has been secured, no dispute can possible arise.

From this it is perfectly clear that the origin of

disputes must lie in some fact or condition connected with the possession of that about which Labour is employed, and the discovery of that fact or condition will at once expose the evil principle which causes all the trouble. Let us first try to find an answer to the question, "Why do men strike?"

Generally the ostensible reason is that they want higher wages, which employers either cannot or will not concede. If labourers, dissatisfied with their wages, could readily find other employment, or occupy themselves on the land, they would not be compelled to strike, for they would naturally prefer such a change to the misery and loss incurred by a strike. But the deadweight of taxation we impose on them crushes the life out of so many enterprises, and prevents the birth of so many more, that other employment is seldom to be found; and the land is not open except under conditions that forbid its use to those who have no capital. Thus restricted, the labourer must either accept the offered wage or strike. If he accept, he is very soon compelled to accept a lower wage, and still a lower, until he faces the alternative of "work and semi-starvation, without hope of improvement," or "strike and semi-starvation, sweetened by hope." By repeated reductions of wages he is compelled to strike; but he would prefer other work if he could find it, or content himself with making his own living out of the land if he were not prevented from doing so.

If now we ask, "Why are wages reduced?" the reason given is that profits are so small that expenses must be cut down or work stopped. The owner of the opportunity for the profitable employment of Labour is, therefore, in much the same dilemma as the labourer, and reduces wages not out of pure greed for higher profits, but because he sees profit rapidly disappearing and loss coming nearer. Having the power through his ownership to decide between reducing wages and stopping work, he naturally chooses the former as the lesser evil. So it goes on until either a strike or a lock-out can no longer be avoided.

If we inquire further, "What swallows up all the profits?" we learn that taxes take so much, freight so much, interest so much, and expenses so much, leaving but little, sometimes nothing, to provide for extra wages.

The case may then be summed up in this way: Along with the ownership of an opportunity for the profitable employment of Labour is conferred the power of reducing wages, which power the owner is compelled to exercise repeatedly until either a strike or a lock-out occurs, and his valuable opportunity is rendered valueless to him, to his labourers and to the State; and in addition there is an all round loss from so many idle consumers being thrown, as they must be, upon the already over-burdened shoulders of the producers.

We next seek an answer to the question, "How is the owner compelled to reduce wages?" and the reply is that the owner obtains his title of possession by virtue of the provisions of one or other of several Acts of Parliament, whose operation is to invite private persons to acquire possession of land from the State. The land constitutes the base of every industrial enterprise, but if the owner should make any attempt to use his land for any such purpose the State immediately comes down upon him with other Acts of Parliament imposing taxes, duties, tolls, fees, rates, and assessments of various kinds, which fall wholly upon production, because without production there would obviously be no means of paying them. The operation of these tax-imposing Acts is to punish those private persons who accept the invitation of the State to buy land, if they attempt to make their land productive. If they persist in the attempt taxes are heaped upon them until all profit is swallowed up, and the unfortunate owner is compelled either to reduce the wages of his labourers or to abandon his enterprise. If he reduces wages his workmen strike, and the same end is attained.

The people have always been keenly alive to the fact that these laws were harassing them in this atrocious way, and have insisted upon the repeal of this or the alteration of that law which seemed to them to be the cause of injury. But though these laws have been altered and amended over and over again, they

still continue to punish the people, and the people demand more amendments still, although of the original Acts but little now remains beyond the fundamental maxim upon which they were constructed. That fundamental maxim is the heathen sage's legacy we have preferred to our own Christian precepts.

Unearthed at last, "the greatest good of the greatest number" is thus clearly exposed as the evil principle underlying all our legislation, tainting and corrupting every proposition based upon its delusive promises, and drawing nothing but mischief from measures honestly intended by their framers to do to some at least a small amount of good.

By process of exhaustion we have thus reduced these laws to their last persistent features, their evil basis and their evil effects, and are, therefore, justified in claiming that in this heathen maxim we have discovered the *Fons et origo malorum*, the source of all the ills that curse the lot of poor, blind, struggling humanity. This is "the condition attached to the possession of land—that about which Labour is employed," in which lies the origin of disputes between employers and their workmen.

To this same evil principle all our other ills are as clearly traceable as this of the "Labour Question," but to follow it through all its intricacies and contortions would be a gigantic task. When once the true tendency of its malignant influence is under-

stood, the mind can readily grasp the links connecting it with any and all of its evil fruits.

Thus the indictment against the Law is proven ; it is found guilty, and condemned by its own ill-doing.

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