

CHAPTER VII.

LOOKING FORWARD.

THE foundations on which it is proposed to build being thus set out, and indications given of the nature of the structure intended to be raised thereon, a short space may now be devoted to an attempt to realise, in imagination, some of the benefits it will confer.

Let it first be granted that the New System has been for some time in force as the "settled policy" of New South Wales; then let us try to picture the resulting improvement in the condition of the country and the people.

Since the abolition of tariff taxation and the departure of the first free train from Sydney, up to the present day, the march of prosperity has been rapid, uninterrupted and triumphant, brilliantly vindicating the principles upon which those reforms were introduced. At first there were not wanting numbers of those wiseacres who are always at hand to worry, annoy, and obstruct those who would sweep away any musty, dusty, antique rubbish, or give the world the benefit of any new and bright idea; who think anything of the kind is condemned beyond redemption when they have dubbed it "an innovation;" who are always full of forebodings of "dire disasters" and "terrible calamities" when any reform is proposed.

But, so far, no catastrophe has occurred to lessen our appreciation of the benefits we now enjoy, although the traffic on our railways has increased so greatly that it has been found necessary again to quadruplicate the suburban lines and duplicate most of the country lines. No trains of empty trucks or passenger cars are now to be seen, for there is always a pressure on the accommodation for both goods and passengers that keeps the energies of the Railway Commissioners always awake to the necessity of adding to their rolling stock. Every little country station is a scene of busy life and activity that affords abundant evidence of new fulness and vigour in productive enterprises—evidence that the New System is not only conducive to the advantage of the people, but that it also stimulates their energies and their intelligence to the best and most effective methods. In all directions may be seen symptoms of the marvellous improvement that has taken place, for the railways no longer pass through untrodden forests or by neglected or deserted farms. Along all the lines the farmers are busy as bees in their luxuriant fields; vineyards, orchards, and orange groves show the extent to which the wine and fruitgrowing industries have expanded, large quantities of fruit and wine being sent to India and Europe. The shipments of wheat to England are now more than the whole produce of a few years back, while the quantity of sugar produced more than doubles the former import of that commodity.

In mining districts similar progress may be observed; mines of coal, iron, tin, gold, copper, and other minerals are being worked wherever they can be found in payable quantities; the iron industry especially is rapidly growing in magnitude and importance.

In pastoral affairs great progress has been made, the number of horses, cattle, and sheep have largely increased, wool has improved both in quality and quantity, whilst the export meat trade has made enormous strides.

Manufactures of all kinds are in a most flourishing condition, those of iron and steel being now the most important in the whole country on account of the immense demand for machinery of all kinds, and the magnitude of our requirements for Railways and shipbuilding.

Many new industries have been established, a marked feature in connection with which is the fact that each is located in the best natural position, that site being selected, as a matter of course, which presents the best and greatest natural advantages for carrying on any particular industry. By availing themselves of such natural aids manufacturers are enabled to produce a greater quantity at the least possible cost. There is thus a tendency for manufactures of similar kinds to gather in groups, which greatly facilitates improvement and saves waste of both time and material. The same tendency is

observable in regard to agriculture, wheat, oats, maize, lucerne, sugar, oranges, apples, and other fruits, each favouring particular districts where they flourish more abundantly than elsewhere.

New Railways are being built as rapidly as the supply of labour and material will permit, the demands for accommodation and extension increasing more rapidly than our ability to comply with them.

So far the condition of the country continues to improve with undiminished vigour, the returns of every industry testifying to an unparalleled progress and prosperity that more than fulfil the most sanguine expectations of the founders of the New System.

Meanwhile the condition of the people has undergone a change for the better, as is shown by the figures of the Government Statistician for the last census, which prove beyond doubt that there has been a vast decrease in crime, intemperance, illegitimacy, and insanity, accompanied by an equally remarkable increase in the marriage rate and the birth rate, which proves an increase of wealth and comfort, and the existence of a real "Golden Age" of happiness and prosperity, that is no figment of a poetic imagination. Perhaps the most striking feature disclosed by the census is the vast addition to the population during the last few years. The initiation of the New System was the signal for the invasion of the country by a swarm of immigrants from both the Old and the New World, as well as from the other Australasian colonies.

This swarm continues to come with little diminution, and it is calculated that, if it is maintained for another ten years, it will add ten millions to our already largely-augmented population. These immigrants are not the outcasts or ne'er-do-wells' of other countries, but a busy, pushing, eager throng, whose very appearance shows that they are not afraid of either work or hardship; but anxious to begin afresh the demonstration of that grand truth, denied or despised by so many in the days of the old *regime* that *enterprise needs no coddling*, no meddling, tinkering, "tin pot" legislators to give it the life and vigour which are its own inherent qualities, but only "a fair field and no favour" to enable it to display its power to overcome and subdue the earth.

The arrival of the vanguard of this army of workers was but the beginning of the invasion which has filled the whole country with a most industrious and thriving population, whose smiling farms and happy homesteads form so notable a feature in the landscape bordering upon the lines of railways which used to pass through leagues of wilderness and unbroken bush. Having free access to the land in all directions, there is nothing to prevent them from becoming landowners or tenants of farms, where they are able to earn sufficient to maintain their families in comparative affluence. Just at first there was so great a "rush" to obtain farms that labour was for a while very scarce, and this scarcity was made greater by

the demand for hands for a number of new industries, but the inflow of population soon restored the balance, and the condition of affairs is now most satisfactory. In the old days there was, as has been shown, a never-ceasing, ever-increasing influence at work driving and enticing people out of the country districts into the cities, where, by the heavy tolls on travelling, they were as effectually shut in as by a wall, and so compelled to become consumers of that of which they had been producers, diminishing the share of all by lessening the amount produced, and adding to the burdens of those who still obstinately continued to produce. The double tendency of this influence was to deplete the country districts and over-crowd the cities, and to produce misery and starvation in the country districts, and misery, starvation, vice, and crime in the cities.

These evil symptoms have now entirely disappeared. Instead of driving the people into the cities, the New System encourages them to distribute themselves over the country wherever there is work to be done, or land that can be used to advantage. Even the rogues and vagabonds have discovered that it is both easier and pleasanter to make an honest living without risking their liberty, than to live by plunder and pass half their lives in gaol. As a natural consequence, drunkenness and debauchery have become rare, whilst the vices peculiar to the poor and miserable have almost entirely disappeared, and the general

social and moral improvement of the people is even greater than their temporal advancement. This need not seem strange to enlightened and civilised Christians when even Cicero, heathen as he was, knew that "to give men happiness is to bring them nearer to God." But it is, nevertheless, a complete vindication of the New System, and a confutation of those who held that evil is an indigenous growth in every human heart, while virtue is but an exotic culture; who maintained that it is impossible to decrease the average residuum of poverty, sin, or sorrow in the world, or to elevate and improve man's moral nature.

The demonstration of this truth is the crowning triumph of the New System.

The other Australian colonies regarded the inauguration of the new policy in New South Wales with calm confidence in their own superiority, not a little mixed with wonder that the oldest and most conservative of the group should thus be the first to run counter to the traditions of ancient wisdom. Their complacency was soon exchanged for admiration of the renewed vigour and vitality displayed by the mother colony; and their admiration speedily gave place to alarm for their own safety when they awoke to the fact that their people seemed with one consent to have become eager to determine which colony could be first abandoned to the crows and kangaroos. They started for New South Wales at first in tens, then in hundreds, and, before anything

could be decided upon, the hundreds had grown to thousands, "and still they came," leaving behind only those who could not get away.

Then it was seen that the same attraction which drew them away must be relied upon to bring them back, or at least to induce *some* to stay at home, and the New System at once became law from Cape York to the Leeuwin.

The Federal Government was shortly afterwards established, and one of its first measures was a provision for the extension of the system of free carriage to our immense ocean traffic. All the Orient and P. and O. steamers were bought, and a number of still larger vessels ordered before the scheme was divulged. Of course, a great outcry was immediately raised by those who could not see what benefit was to be derived from the step, although the advantages are but little less than those conferred by free land-carriage. The Federal Government, however, was not to be deterred by the clamour of these, and proceeded further to buy up all the coasting steamers, and thus took the entire carrying trade of the country into its own hands. It was very soon made clear that the public regarded the change with approval, and its value was put beyond doubt by the arrival of several vessels in rapid succession, all crowded with immigrants ready to go to work, at a time when the scarcity of labourers seemed likely to involve the country in disaster. After that there was no more

grumbling, and all went "merry as a marriage bell." Every vessel that arrived was full, both of cargo and passengers, for the former cost nothing beyond the expense of putting it on board, and the latter had to pay only for food and attendance on the voyage.

Never in the history of the world has there been any parallel to the life and activity now displayed by all the colonies of the Australian Federation. As the uninterrupted stream of immigration continued to pour into them, adding new strength to the productive power of the people, there has been a continuous growth in all branches of industrial enterprise—a growth so rapid and so great that, although the whole energies of the Government are directed to prevent waste, it is at times difficult to find adequate means for transporting to seaport or to market the enormous results of the people's productive energy.

The question of the Federal Capital, which was allowed to remain for some time in abeyance, having at length been settled, and the capital fixed at Centralia, a new direction has been given to much of the land traffic. Trunk lines have been constructed to connect the Federal City with the old capitals; which are still the principal seaports of the country, though many new ones have been established of late, and others are in course of formation.

Our mercantile marine has kept pace with our advance in other respects; and we now have a fleet of ocean steamers that will compare favourably with

any in the world. On account of the rapid growth of the coastal traffic under the New System, it has been found necessary to add large numbers of new vessels to our coasting fleet. To supply these the new iron shipbuilding industries were established, and have been kept busy ever since; and have, indeed, been of most signal national service.

The Federal Railway system is a very wonderful feature in the new map of Australia, the lines stretching outward from Centralia to the coast being crossed at intervals by connecting lines, which impart to a railway map the appearance of a huge geometrical pattern. As the system extends, it will still more decidedly assume that character, for it is not intended to allow the lines to grow at haphazard, but to build them in accordance with a definite scheme prepared by a skilful staff of engineers.

The abolition of all other governmental taxes of every kind was a reform which speedily followed the introduction of the New System. It was seen that these taxes were entirely unnecessary, and that the ever-increasing value of the land provided a revenue so abundant and elastic that they were no longer required; but they were abolished chiefly because of their maleficent nature. In connection with our civil and criminal courts, the charges had long been condemned for their injustice, and because they provided a means of extortion and oppression in the hands of unscrupulous officials and litigants, and were

at all times a burden to the poor, who found it hard enough to live, without having to buy justice. It was accordingly declared unlawful to make any charge whatever in connection with the administration of justice, which was still further improved by the abolition of the "time-honoured system of trial by jury," the place of both jury and counsel being taken by two assistant judges, whose function it is to see that justice is done in accordance not only with the law of the land, but with the higher law of right and truth. The practice of allowing counsel to plead, to examine, and conduct cases, has been swept away, and a much simpler form of procedure adopted, which renders it unprofitable to any man to waste time in the courts; and it is no longer the interest of any that cases should be prolonged for months that might easily be settled in an hour.

After considerable discussion the Post and Telegraph Offices were declared free, and letters and telegrams were carried without charge, except for delivery by special messenger.

The next batch of burdens consisted of all that remained of the Old System, Municipal rates, gas rates, water rates, sewerage rates, the rabbit tax, and all other charges, fees, rates, tolls, taxes or assessments, levied in accordance with the provisions of any Act of Parliament, were consigned together to oblivion. Then began the reign of the Single Tax as the one supreme and only tax for the whole nation.

Against the abolition of the duties on wines and spirits a desperate fight was made by the Local Optionists and Sons of Temperance, who urged that these should rather be increased than abolished. Against them it was argued—that publicans' licenses gave to certain houses, specially set apart for the business, the monopoly of the retail traffic in intoxicating liquor; that those houses thus became a rendezvous for toppers and tipplers, who were thereby encouraged, and encouraged one another, to deeper indulgence than if each should buy in a place where he would not be allowed to stop and drink, even as people buy meat and bread which they carry away and consume in private; that these licenses made it the interest as well as the business of the publican to sell as much liquor as possible, thus deliberately providing a class to debase and ruin as many as possible of their fellow-citizens; that the abolition of the license fee would make the liquor trade a part of ordinary business and would abolish pot-houses and ginshops, to the great and manifest gain of the whole community; that provision could be made to prevent the gathering of confirmed drunkards in any house for the purpose of drinking, by treating drunkenness as an aberration of intellect and secluding patients for special medical treatment until they should be pronounced cured, instead of giving them "twenty-four hours in the cells;" and much more to a similar effect. Nothing, however, would persuade the temperance people that the

removal of these taxes would not expose the entire population to the imminent danger of becoming confirmed drunkards, simply because liquor would be so much cheaper. They were evidently of opinion that only their efforts had hitherto prevented that catastrophe, and that *the license fee had assisted them*, not perceiving that they must fight in vain against the allurements of strong liquor while so many others were rendering those allurements still more attractive and still more potent by every means in their power. The result has proved that their apprehensions were groundless, for since the liquor trade has been *unrestricted*, drunkenness has become rare, although, of course, intemperance is still a vice all too prevalent. In our struggle against its enticements we now have the most powerful of all possible assistance in the quickly rising standard of moral life and conduct more generally adopted among the people, as they free themselves from the evil influence of old associations, and raise themselves by degrees above the level where infamy and vice bring no shame to the misery-encrusted soul.

The establishment of "The State Bank of Federated Australia" was another benefit, the founding of which was, perhaps, only hastened by the New System, for its necessity had been foreseen even before the discussion about the New System had arisen. It was formed for the purpose of managing all the financial business of the Government, and

arranging the liquidation of the public debts of the federated colonies. The revenue obtainable from the Single Tax, being at all times easily and simply adjustable to our requirements, it has been a matter of no great difficulty to relieve the country of the pressure of so great a burden of debt. Funds for the construction of railways or other large and expensive public works can easily be found by an almost inappreciable addition to the ordinary rate of the Single Tax, when the amount raised proves insufficient. That has as yet occurred only once, when a large instalment of the public debt and a heavy payment on account of new railways became due at the same time. The rate has been lowered three times since the first levy, when it was found that the revenue was much greater than the expenditure, owing to the unexpected expansiveness of the value of the land.

The State Bank has proved itself a very useful institution in many respects, but the one feature that has most endeared it to the people is the system of issuing State debentures in exchange for the title deeds of land, which may be redeemed by the repayment of the amount of the debentures, provided only that the annual tax has not fallen into arrears beyond the value of the owner's improvements, in which case the State may sell or lease the land, reserving the right of redemption for five years only. In this way, Capital locked up in land is set free to add its share to the wealth of the country, and no individual is

hampered for want of funds to make his land more productive, or by the difficulty of finding a purchaser if he should wish to sell it. The method of issuing debentures is very simple, the owner merely lodging his deeds and his Single Tax Assessment to show the value of the land, and receiving in exchange debentures for the amount he may require up to the total value, and a receipt for his deeds showing the amount for which they are held. This receipt is a negotiable security, and may be sold, mortgaged, transferred, or bequeathed, the holder being the owner for the time being of the equity of redemption, and of such value over and above its debenture value, as the land may possess or acquire. The debentures are negotiable documents of the nature of bank notes, and may be used in exactly the same way. Bearing no interest, their face value shows their worth; and, being of large denomination only, they are of the greatest service in all commercial transactions. The advantage to the State, in lieu of interest, lies in the additional value given to the land by the expenditure of the debenture capital in increasing its productive power, or in the establishment of reproductive enterprises, which add to the wealth of the whole community—of the individual producer, and to the State revenue.

The justice of this system has been called in question, but without exposing any fault in it; for it is clear that, since the State derives its revenue from the land, and has already received its value for it,

and is, moreover, a direct gainer by this method of dealing with it, there is every reason why the State and the landowner should be mutually advantaged in this way, and no reason at all why they should not, except that it puts an end to the old usurious system which returned large profits to shareholders in land mortgage companies by killing off the productive industries which are the breath of life to the community.
