

out? If they were as strong as he he could not get out himself.

A short time ago a certain writer, much esteemed for his graceful style of saying silly things, informed us that the poor remain poor because they show no efficient desire to be anything else. Is that true? Are only the idle poor? Come with me and I will show you where men and women work from morning till night, from week to week, from year to year, at the full stretch of their powers, in dim and fœtid dens, and yet are poor—ay, destitute—have for their wages a crust of bread and rags. I will show you where men work in dirt and heat, using the strength of brutes, for a dozen hours a day and sleep at night in styes, until brain and muscle are exhausted and fresh slaves are yoked to the golden car of commerce, and the broken drudges filter through the union or the prison to a felon's or a pauper's grave! And I will show you how men and women thus work and suffer and faint and die, generation after generation; and I will show you how the longer and the harder these wretches toil the worse their lot becomes; and I will show you the graves, and find witnesses to the histories of brave and noble and industrious poor men whose lives were lives of toil, and poverty, and whose deaths were tragedies.

And all these things are due to sin—but it is to the sin of the smug hypocrites who grow rich upon the robbery and the ruin of their fellow-creatures.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RIGHTS OF THE INDIVIDUAL.

I think that my contention, which I see quoted by Mr Goschen, could be exhaustively proved, that every act of the legislature which seems to interfere with the doctrine of *laissez-faire*, and has stood the test of experience, has been endorsed because it has added to the general efficiency of labour, and, therefore, to the general well-being of society.—*Thorold Rogers*.

Law was made for property alone.—*Macaulay*.

You have, very likely, heard of the thing called Individualism. You may have read articles or heard speeches in which Socialism has been assailed as an interference

with the rights of the individual. You may have wondered why among the rights of the individual, no place was given to the right to live; or that the apostles of Individualism should be so strangely blind to the danger of leaving private enterprise *un-curbed*. But you need not wonder about these things, for Individualism is a relic of savagery and its apologists would be agitating for the return of the good old individual right of carrying a stone club and living by promiscuous robbery and murder, were they not convinced that the law of supply and demand, although a more cowardly and brutal weapon than the cannibal's club, is infinitely more deadly and effective.

Society consists of individuals—so Herbert Spencer says. And that dogma if it means anything, means that society is a concourse of independent atoms and not a united whole. But you know that statement is not in accord with fact or reason—not to speak of morality. You know that society consists of a number of more or less antagonistic parties, united amongst themselves for purposes of social warfare, and that where an independent individual is found he is always either a good man, trying to persuade the combatants to reason and righteousness; or a bad man, trying to fleece them that his own nest may be warm.

How, indeed, can society be a multitude of unconnected units? I look in my dictionary, and I find the word "society" defined as "a union of persons in one interest; fellowship." And clearly, society means a number of men joined by interest or affection. For how can that be a society which has no social connections? A mob of antagonistic individuals is a chaos, not a society.

And with regard to that claim that men should be left free to fight each for his own hand—is that civilisation or anarchy? And will it result in peace or in war, in prosperity or in disaster? Not civilisation, but savagery; not Christianity, but cannibalism is the spirit of this doctrine of selfishness and folly. And I ask you again in this case, as I did in the case of the gospel of "avarice": Is not love stronger than hate? And will not a society founded on love and justice certainly flourish, as the society founded on hate and strife will certainly perish?

Before you answer look around you at the state of

England to-day, and cast back in your mind for the lessons of the nations that are gone. What is the apex of the gospel of avarice and of the law of supply and demand? Sweating! What is the result of the liberty of the individual, to cozen the strong and destroy the weak for the sake of useless gain or worthless power? Does not one man wax rich by making many poor—one man dwells in a palace by keeping many in hovels? And are not the people crushed with taxation, which the impotent and lazy squander and misuse?

One Individualist, Mr. Levy, in an article written by him against Socialism a few years ago, says that—

The Individualist denies to A and B the right of prescribing for C what will do him good, and forcing it down his throat by the aid of the policeman's truncheon. He denies that A and B have any right whatever to coerce C, *except to prevent him invading the rights of others, and to exact from him his share in the maintenance of the common liberties.*

The italics are mine. On this point we are agreed. Our difference is as to what constitutes an "Invasion of the rights of others." I say, why punish the kind of thief we call a burglar, and not the kind of thief we call a sweater? Why hang the murderer who kills in the heat of passion and from motives of jealousy or revenge, and not the murderer who slays wholesale by the death-trap of the slums, and slays in cold blood, and from the bestial motive of gain?

Mr Levy says of Individualism:—

It would strive to make the law such that, in the words of Kant—"Every one may seek his own happiness in the way that seems good to himself, provided that he infringe not such freedom of others to strive after a similar end as is consistent with the freedom of all."

This is the same idea expressed in different words. Where are we to draw the line as to the "infringement of the freedom of others"? Are we to let the sweater and the retailer of diseased meat "seek their own happiness in a way that seems good to themselves"? Are we to stop the men who infringe the freedom of others by aid of the machinery of capitalist monopoly? Or are we only to stop the other rogues and ruffians who infringe our freedom with

the bludgeon and the bullet? We agree that it is right for society to protect itself against *some* scoundrels. We differ as to which scoundrels are to be restrained.

Mr. Auberon Herbert says:—

Government has no moral right to compel men for their own good, but only to restrain them from such aggressions upon each other as involve physical force, or such direct fraud as is the equivalent of physical force, from the point of view of the consent to transaction of the defrauded person.

And another tract of his is headed by the following quotation from Mr. Herbert Spencer:—

The liberty of each, limited alone by the like liberty of all.

Now, you will observe that Government is here granted the power to restrain one man from injuring another by physical violence or from injuring him by "direct fraud," but is not to have power to restrain the operations of indirect fraud. But why should Government be allowed to prevent violence? Why should Government be allowed to prevent murder or highway robbery? I don't know what reason the Individualist has for his belief that Government should defend the subject from the burglar and the forger. Because, if it is best to let the more criminal and more dangerous sweater rob and slay, I cannot understand why it is necessary to interfere with the footpad and the scuttler. The reason I have for supporting the Government in its protection of the subject is easily given. But I'd rather use the word Society than the word Government.

Society, according to my philosophy, is a union of people for mutual advantage. Every member of a society must give up some small fraction of his own will and advantage in return for the advantages he gains from association with his fellows. One of the advantages he derives from association with his fellows is protection from injury. The chief function of Government—which is the executive power of the society's will—is to protect the subject. Against whom is the subject to be protected? I should say against foreign enemies, against injury by his fellow-subjects, and against calamities caused by his own ignorance. We will lay by the first and third propositions, and consider the second.

The subject is to be protected by the Government from injury by his fellow-subjects. Here I traverse the position of the Individualists. They will restrain the assassin and the passer of base coin, but they will not suffer any interference with the sacred liberty of the slum landlord or the sweater. And I fail to see their reason.

There is no reason visible to my mind for empowering the Government, or society, to hang the man who steals a watch and murders the owner, except the reason I have given—that it is for the general advantage that society should be allowed to protect one of its members from injury by another. If that is the real reason why Government may hang a Charles Peace or send an “Artful Dodger” to gaol, then it is also a sufficient reason why Government protection should be extended beyond the limits laid down in Mr. Herbert’s tracts. Because the sweater and the rack-renter, and the respectable dealer in adulterated goods are not only morally worse than the footpad and the area-sneak, but they are also guilty of greater and more deadly injury to their fellow-subjects.

True, sweating and land-grabbing and other forms of the basest villainy are not illegal; and I would not have them illegally meddled with. But I would alter the law so that they should be illegal. This, I presume, Mr. Herbert would not do. He will only defend us from the garrotter and the confidence-trick man. But I think it is as bad for a railway company to work a man a hundred and eight hours for seventeen shillings, or for a landlord to charge rent for a death trap, or for a tailor to grind his hands down to a slavery that takes up all their waking hours and gives them in return a diet of bread and coffee, as for a thief to come and steal your false teeth. Nay, the sweater is altogether a more hateful, dangerous, deadly, and cowardly scoundrel than the pickpocket.

Of course, the sweater’s slave and the railway porter are the “free” parties to the bargain. They need not accept the bloodsucker’s terms unless they choose. They have an alternative—they can starve. But I presume that even the most confirmed Individualist would stop a man from jumping down a precipice, or throwing himself under a train. That would be physical injury, against which it is right to pro-

tect each other. But the poor girl who takes her suicide in the form of shirt-making is not to be interfered with. You must respect free contract and the liberty of the individual.

Individual liberty is what we all desire—so far as it is possible to have it. But it is *not* possible to have it in its complete form, whilst we live in communities. By living in communities, men get many advantages. It is not good for man to be alone. For the advantages that society gives us, we must make some sacrifice. We might well have much more individual liberty than we now have. We might easily have too much. We *have* too much—and too little—as things stand. A state of Socialism would give us all as much liberty as we need. A state of Individualism—of anarchy—would give *some* of us more liberty than it is wise and beneficial we should have.

Most men are honest, most men love justice. For the great mass of the people the law is almost a dead letter. Honest men need no laws—*except* to defend them from rascals. Have you ever asked yourselves, my friends, what price our rascals cost us? For *them* is all the costly machinery of Government, of armies, of fleets, of law courts, of prisons, police, workhouses, and the like maintained. Honest men do not need watching, for they would not steal; do not need repelling, for they would not invade. Consider the cost of all our police in its various forms, and then say what do our rascals cost us.

If it had not been for interference with the liberty of the individual and the freedom of contract in the past the lot of the workers would have been unbearable.

Do you know anything about the Truck Act, which abolished the nefarious custom of paying wages in bad food? Did you ever consider the effect of forbidding the payment of wages in public-houses, or the employment of climbing-boys by sweeps? Have you ever read the history of the Factory Acts?

In "The Industrial History of England," by H. de B. Gibbins, M.A., you will find a few brief sketches of the state of things to which unchecked freedom of contract had reduced the factory workers before the Factory Acts were passed. From that book I will make a few extracts:—

ENGLISH SLAVERY: THE APPRENTICE SYSTEM.

It was not until the wages of the workmen had been reduced to a starvation level that they consented to their children and wives being employed in the mills. But the manufacturers wanted labour by some means or other, and they got it. They got it from the workhouses. They sent for parish apprentices from all parts of England, and pretended to apprentice them to the new employments just introduced. The millowners systematically communicated with the overseers of the poor, who arranged a day for the inspection of pauper children. Those chosen by the manufacturer were then conveyed by wagons or canal boats to their destination, and from that moment were doomed to slavery. Sometimes regular traffickers would take the place of the manufacturer, and transfer a number of children to a factory district, and there keep them, generally in some dark cellar, till they could hand them over to a mill-owner in want of hands, who would come and examine their height, strength, and bodily capacities, exactly as did the slave dealers in the American markets. After that the children were simply at the mercy of their owners, nominally as apprentices, but in reality as mere slaves, who got no wages, and whom it was not worth while to feed and clothe properly, because they were so cheap and their places could be so easily supplied. It was often arranged by the parish authorities, in order to get rid of imbeciles, that one idiot should be taken by the mill-owner with every twenty sane children. The fate of these unhappy idiots was even worse than that of the others. The secret of their final end has never been disclosed, but we can form some idea of their awful sufferings from the hardships of the other victims to capitalist greed and cruelty. Their treatment was most inhuman. The hours of their labour were only limited by exhaustion after many modes of torture had been unavailingly applied to force continued work. Children were often worked sixteen hours a day, by day and by night. Even Sunday was used as a convenient time to clean the machinery. The author of the "History of the Factory Movement" writes: "In stench, in heated rooms, amidst a constant whirling of a thousand wheels, little fingers and little feet were kept in ceaseless action, forced into unnatural activity by blows from the heavy hands and feet of the merciless over-looker, and the infliction of bodily pain by instruments of punishment invented by the sharpened ingenuity of insatiable selfishness." They were fed upon the coarsest and cheapest food, often with the same as that served out to the pigs of their master. They slept by turns and in relays, in filthy beds which were never cool; for one set of children were sent to sleep in them as soon as the others had gone off to their daily or nightly toil. There was often no discrimination of the sexes; and disease and misery and vice grew as in a hot-bed of contagion. Some of these miserable beings tried to run away. To prevent their doing so, those suspected of this tendency had irons riveted on their ankles with

long links reaching to the hips, and were compelled to work and sleep in these chains, young women and girls as well as boys suffering this brutal treatment. Many died and were buried secretly at night in some desolate spot, lest people should notice the number of the graves ; and many committed suicide."

In 1873, Lord Shaftesbury, speaking in the House of Lords, said:—

Well can I recollect, in the earlier periods of the factory movement, waiting at the factory gates to see the children come out, and a set of sad, dejected, cadaverous creatures they were. In Bradford, especially, the proofs of long and cruel toil were most remarkable. The cripples and distorted forms might be numbered by hundreds, perhaps by thousands. A friend of mine collected a vast number together for me; the sight was most piteous, the deformities incredible. They seemed to me, such were their crooked shapes, like a mass of crooked alphabets.

You will find further particulars of these horrors in the Blue Books of the period. Read them; read also the Blue Books on the sweating system, and the reports of the Labour Commission; read the facts relating to the Truck Acts and the chain and nail trades, and then read Mrs. Browning's pathetic poem, of "The Cry of the Children," and I think you will be cured of any lingering affection for the "Freedom of Contract," and the "Rights of the Individual."

I quite understand Mr. Herbert's desire for "Liberty." But we cannot have liberty while we have rascals. Liberty is another of the things we have to pay for the pleasure of the rascal's company. Now I think Individualism strengthens the hands of the rogue in his fight with the true man; and I think Socialism would fortify the true men against the rascals. I grant you that State Socialism would imply some interference with the liberty of the individual. But *which* individual? The scoundrel. Imagine a dozen men at sea in a boat with only two days' provisions? Would it be wise to consider the liberty of the individual? If the strongest man took all the food and left the others to starve would it be right or wrong for the eleven men to combine to bind him and divide all fairly? To let the strong or the cunning rob the weak or honest is Individualism. To prevent the rascal from taking what is not his own is Socialism