

CHAPTER IV.

TWO OPPOSING TENDENCIES.

SO much freer, so much higher, so much fuller and wider is the life of our time, that, looking back, we cannot help feeling something like pity, if not contempt, for preceding generations.

Comforts, conveniences, luxuries, that a little while ago wealth could not purchase, are now matters of ordinary use. We travel in an hour, easily and comfortably, what to our fathers was a hard day's journey; we send in minutes messages that, in their time, would have taken weeks. We are better acquainted with remote countries than they with regions little distant; we know as common things what to them were fast-locked secrets of nature; our world is larger, our horizon is wider; in the years of our lives we may see more, do more, learn more.

Consider the diffusion of knowledge, the quickened transmission of intelligence. Compare the school-books used by our children with the school-books used by our fathers; see how cheap printing has brought within the reach of the masses the very treasures of literature; how enormously it has widened the audience of the novelist, the historian, the essayist and the poet; see how superior are even the trashy novels and story-papers in which shop-girls delight, to the rude ballads and "last dying speeches and confessions," which were their prototypes.

Look at the daily newspapers, read even by the poorest, and giving to them glimpses of the doings of all classes of society, news from all parts of the world. Consider the illustrated journals that every week bring to the million pictures of life in all phases and in all countries—bird's-eye views of cities, of grand and beautiful landscapes; the features of noted men and women; the sittings of parliaments, and congresses, and conventions; the splendor of courts, and the wild life of savages; triumphs of art; glories of architecture; processes of industry; achievements of inventive skill. Such a panorama as thus, week after week, passes before the eyes of common men and women, the richest and most powerful could not a generation ago have commanded.

These things, and the many other things that the mention of these will suggest, are necessarily exerting a powerful influence upon thought and feeling. Superstitions are dying out, prejudices are giving way, manners and customs are becoming assimilated, sympathies are widening, new aspirations are quickening the masses.

We come into the world with minds ready to receive any impression. To the eyes of infancy all is new, and one thing is no more wonderful than another. In whatever lies beyond common experience we assume the beliefs of those about us, and it is only the strongest intellects that can in a little raise themselves above the accepted opinions of their times. In a community where that opinion prevailed, the vast majority of us would as unhesitatingly believe that the earth is a plain, supported by a gigantic elephant, as we now believe it a sphere circling round the sun. No theory is too false, no fable too absurd, no superstition too degrading for acceptance when it has become embedded in common belief. Men will submit themselves to tortures and to death, mothers will immolate their children, at the bidding of beliefs they thus accept.

What more unnatural than polygamy? Yet see how long and how widely polygamy has existed!

In this tendency to accept what we find, to believe what we are told, is at once good and evil. It is this which makes social advance possible; it is this which makes it so slow and painful. Each generation thus obtains without effort the hard-won knowledge bequeathed to it; it is thus, also, enslaved by errors and perversions which it in the same way receives.

It is thus that tyranny is maintained and superstition perpetuated. Polygamy is unnatural. Obvious facts of universal experience prove this. The uniform proportion in which the sexes are brought into the world; the exclusiveness of the feeling with which in healthy conditions they attract each other; the necessities imposed by the slow growth and development of children, point to the union of one man with one woman as the intent of Nature. Yet, although it is repugnant to the most obvious facts and to the strongest instincts, polygamy seems a perfectly natural thing to those educated in a society where it has become an accepted institution, and it is only by long effort and much struggling that this idea can be eradicated. So with slavery. Even to such minds as those of Plato and Aristotle, to own a man seemed as natural as to own a horse. Even in this nineteenth century and in this "land of liberty," how long has it been since those who denied the right of property in human flesh and blood were denounced as "communists," as "infidels," as "incendiaries," bent on uprooting social order and destroying all property rights? So with monarchy, so with aristocracy, so with many other things as unnatural that are still unquestioningly accepted. Can anything be more unnatural—that is to say, more repugnant to right reason and to the facts and laws of nature—than that those who work least should get most of the things that work produces?

"He that will not work, neither shall he eat." That is not merely the word of the Apostle; it is the obvious law of Nature. Yet all over the world, hard and poor is the fare of the toiling masses; while those who aid production neither with hand nor with head live luxuriously and fare sumptuously. This we have been used to, and it has therefore seemed to us natural; just as polygamy, slavery, aristocracy and monarchy seem natural to those accustomed to them.

But mental habits which made this state of things seem natural are breaking up; superstitions which prevented its being questioned are melting away. The revelations of physical science, the increased knowledge of other times and other peoples, the extension of education, emigration, travel, the rise of the critical spirit and the changes in old methods everywhere going on, are destroying beliefs which made the masses of men content with the position of hewers of wood and drawers of water, are softening manners and widening sympathies, are extending the idea of human equality and brotherhood.

All over the world the masses of men are becoming more and more dissatisfied with conditions under which their fathers would have been contented. It is in vain that they are told that their situation has been much improved; it is in vain that it is pointed out to them that comforts, amusements, opportunities, are within their reach that their fathers would not have dreamed of. The having got so much, only leads them to ask why they should not have more. Desire grows by what it feeds on. Man is not like the ox. He has no fixed standard of satisfaction. To arouse his ambition, to educate him to new wants, is as certain to make him discontented with his lot as to make that lot harder. We resign ourselves to what we think cannot be bettered; but when we realize that improvement is possible, then we become restive. This

is the explanation of the paradox that De Tocqueville thought astonishing: that the masses find their position the more intolerable the more it is improved. The slave codes were wise that prescribed pains and penalties for teaching bondsmen to read, and they reasoned well who opposed popular education on the ground that it would bring revolution.

But there is in the conditions of the civilized world to-day something more portentous than a growing restiveness under evils long endured. Everything tends to awake the sense of natural equality, to arouse the aspirations and ambitions of the masses, to excite a keener and keener perception of the gross injustice of existing inequalities of privilege and wealth. Yet, at the same time, everything tends to the rapid and monstrous increase of these inequalities. Never since great estates were eating out the heart of Rome has the world seen such enormous fortunes as are now arising—and never more utter proletarians. In the paper which contained a many-column account of the Vanderbilt ball, with its gorgeous dresses and its wealth of diamonds, with its profusion of roses, costing \$2 each, and its precious wines flowing like water, I also read a brief item telling how, at a station-house near by, thirty-nine persons—eighteen of them women—had sought shelter, and how they were all marched into court next morning and sent for six months to prison. "The women," said the item, "shrieked and sobbed bitterly as they were carried to prison." Christ was born of a woman. And to Mary Magdalen he turned in tender blessing. But such vermin have some of these human creatures, made in God's image, become, that we must shovel them off to prison without being too particular.

The railroad is a new thing. It has scarcely begun its work. Yet it has already differentiated the man who counts his income by millions every month, and the

thousands of men glad to work for him at from 90 cents to \$1.50 a day. Who shall set bounds, under present tendencies, to the great fortunes of the next generation? Or to the correlatives of these great fortunes, the tramps?

The tendency of all the inventions and improvements so wonderfully augmenting productive power is to concentrate enormous wealth in the hands of a few, to make the condition of the many more hopeless; to force into the position of machines for the production of wealth they are not to enjoy, men whose aspirations are being aroused. Without a single exception that I can think of, the effect of all modern industrial improvements is to production upon a large scale, to the minute division of labor, to the giving to the possession of large capital an overpowering advantage. Even such inventions as the telephone and the typewriter tend to the concentration of wealth, by adding to the ease with which large businesses can be managed, and lessening limitations that after a certain point made further extension more difficult.

The tendency of the machine is in everything not merely to place it out of the power of the workman to become his own employer, but to reduce him to the position of a mere attendant or feeder; to dispense with judgment, skill and brains, save in a few overseers; to reduce all others to the monotonous work of automatons, to which there is no future save the same unvarying round.

Under the old system of handicraft, the workman may have toiled hard and long, but in his work he had companionship, variety, the pleasure that comes of the exercise of creative skill, the sense of seeing things growing under his hand to finished form. He worked in his own home or side by side with his employer. Labor was lightened by emulation, by gossip, by laughter, by discussion. As apprentice, he looked forward to becoming a journeyman; as a journeyman, he looked forward to becoming a master

and taking an apprentice of his own. With a few tools and a little raw material he was independent. He dealt directly with those who used the finished articles he produced. If he could not find a market for money he could find a market in exchange. That terrible dread—the dread of having the opportunities of livelihood shut off; of finding himself utterly helpless to provide for his family—never cast its shadow over him.

Consider the blacksmith of the industrial era now everywhere passing—or rather the “black and white smith,” for the finished workman worked in steel as well. The smithy stood by roadside or street. Through its open doors were caught glimpses of nature; all that was passing could be seen. Wayfarers stopped to inquire, neighbors to tell or hear the news, children to see the hot iron glow and watch the red sparks fly. Now the smith shoed a horse; now he put on a wagon-tire; now he forged and tempered a tool; again he welded a broken andiron, or beat out with graceful art a crane for the deep chimney-place, or, when there was nothing else to do, he wrought iron into nails.

Go now into one of those enormous establishments covering acres and acres, in which workmen by the thousand are massed together, and, by the aid of steam and machinery, iron is converted to its uses at a fraction of the cost of the old system. You cannot enter without permission from the office, for over each door you will find the sign, “Positively no admittance.” If you are permitted to go in, you must not talk to the workmen; but that makes little difference, as amid the din and the clatter, and whirl of belts and wheels, you could not if you would. Here you find men doing over and over the selfsame thing—passing, all day long, bars of iron through great rollers; presenting plates to steel jaws; turning, amid clangor in which you can scarcely “hear yourself think,” bits of iron over and back again, sixty times a minute, for hour after

hour, for day after day, for year after year. In the whole great establishment there will be not a man, save here and there one who got his training under the simpler system now passing away, who can do more than some minute part of what goes to the making of a salable article. The lad learns in a little while how to attend his particular machine. Then his progress stops. He may become gray-headed without learning more. As his children grow, the only way he has of augmenting his income is by setting them to work. As for aspiring to become master of such an establishment, with its millions of capital in machinery and stock, he might as well aspire to be King of England or Pope of Rome. He has no more control over the conditions that give him employment than has the passenger in a railroad car over the motion of the train. Causes which he can neither prevent nor foresee may at any time stop his machine and throw him upon the world, an utterly unskilled laborer, unaccustomed even to swing a pick or handle a spade. When times are good, and his employer is coining money, he can only get an advance by a strike or a threatened strike. At the least symptoms of harder times his wages are scaled down, and he can only resist by a strike, which means, for a longer or shorter time, no wages.

I have spoken of but one trade; but the tendency is the same in all others. This is the form that industrial organization is everywhere assuming, even in agriculture. Great corporations are now stocking immense ranges with cattle, and "bonanza farms" are cultivated by gangs of nomads destitute of anything that can be called home. In all occupations the workman is steadily becoming divorced from the tools and opportunities of labor; everywhere the inequalities of fortune are becoming more glaring. And this at a time when thought is being quickened; when the old forces of conservatism are giving way; when the idea of human equality is growing and spreading.

When between those who work and want and those who live in idle luxury there is so great a gulf fixed that in popular imagination they seem to belong to distinct orders of beings; when, in the name of religion, it is persistently instilled into the masses that all things in this world are ordered by Divine Providence, which appoints to each his place; when children are taught from the earliest infancy that it is, to use the words of the Episcopal catechism, their duty toward God and man to "honor and obey the civil authority," to "order themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters, and to do their duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call them;" when these counsels of humility, of contentment and of self-abasement are enforced by the terrible threat of an eternity of torture, while on the other hand the poor are taught to believe that if they patiently bear their lot here God will after death translate them to a heaven where there is no private property and no poverty, the most glaring inequalities in condition may excite neither envy nor indignation.

But the ideas that are stirring in the world to-day are different from these.

Near nineteen hundred years ago, when another civilization was developing monstrous inequalities, when the masses everywhere were being ground into hopeless slavery, there arose in a Jewish village an unlearned carpenter, who, scorning the orthodoxies and ritualisms of the time, preached to laborers and fishermen the gospel of the fatherhood of God, of the equality and brotherhood of men, who taught his disciples to pray for the coming of the kingdom of heaven on earth. The college professors sneered at him, the orthodox preachers denounced him. He was reviled as a dreamer, as a disturber, as a "communist," and, finally, organized society took the alarm, and he was crucified between two thieves. But the word went forth, and, spread by fugitives and slaves, made its

way against power and against persecution till it revolutionized the world, and out of the rotting old civilization brought the germ of the new. Then the privileged classes rallied again, carved the effigy of the man of the people in the courts and on the tombs of kings, in his name consecrated inequality, and wrested his gospel to the defense of social injustice. But again the same great ideas of a common fatherhood, of a common brotherhood, of a social state in which none shall be overworked and none shall want, begin to quicken in common thought.

When a mighty wind meets a strong current, it does not portend a smooth sea. And whoever will think of the opposing tendencies beginning to develop will appreciate the gravity of the social problems the civilized world must soon meet. He will also understand the meaning of Christ's words when he said :

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword."