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## EDWARD BELLAMY: UTOPIAN<sup>1</sup>

ALBERT WILLIAM LEVI

IN THE May, 1943, issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* there appeared an article by the president of Harvard University entitled "Wanted: American Radicals." In this essay President Conant sketched a contrast between two types of social philosopher of today. The first he called the "American Reactionary"; the second he called the "European Radical." He painted the portrait of each with swift and telling brushwork. The American Reactionary is a man who is politically and economically fixated in our social past. He is the contemporary version of the eighteenth-century aristocrat, arrogant, yet somehow afraid—afraid of the common man, afraid of the insecurity of his social privilege and economic power—who takes refuge in an exaggerated Americanism which he equates with ruthless resistance to all progress and social change.

In dynamic contrast is the European Radical. He is an ardent reformer; but a revolutionary—a man who looks to European shores, to Marx and Engels for his inspiration, a man with something of the neurotic restlessness of big cities, who scorns the native American tradition and who has profound contempt for the landmarks of the American past.

The burden of President Conant's message was the repudiation of both the American Reactionary and the European Radical and the clarion call for a third type, which he called the "American

Radical"—a man like the European Radical in his belief in equality of opportunity and progressive social change but also somewhat like the American Reactionary in his love for our nation and his considered appreciation of the historic value of its tradition. Having painted the portrait of the two thieves, between them President Conant placed the portrait of the savior—indigenous to our shores, springing from the soil, taking Jefferson as his political ideal, and having as his major prophets Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau.

If, in his sketch of the American Radical, President Conant waxed a trifle autobiographical and produced something unconsciously a little like a portrait of the college president as a young man, surely this was wholly natural. But I was surprised, and not a little disappointed, that his list of major prophets did not contain the names of either Thorstein Veblen or Henry George, and more particularly the name of Edward Bellamy; for Bellamy was himself, in his homespun radicalism, his love of America, his Baptist inspiration, and his deep affection for the country and small-town life of his native Chicopee Falls, the very incarnation of the best of our American radical tradition.

It is true, of course, that Bellamy was influenced partially by the writings of Karl Marx and also that in his travels through the great cities of Europe as a youth of eighteen he first became vitally aware of social injustice and the problem of a new society. But what is frequently forgotten is that the discovery of his uto-

<sup>1</sup> The substance of this paper was delivered as a lecture at the University of Chicago during the Summer Quarter, 1943, in a series on "Famous Utopias" under the auspices of the "Institute for the Study of the History of Culture."

pian novel, *Looking Backward*, has probably produced more native American socialists than any reading of Marx, Engels, Lenin, or the customary European sources. Bellamy's power of social persuasion is all the greater because he did not start out as a reformer with the conscious object of converting others to his social gospel. He was, indeed, primarily not a social theorist, but something of a romantic poet, a quiet, vague, deeply religious man whose father had been a Baptist minister for thirty-five years and from whom he undoubtedly derived that moral idealism which prevented him from engaging in the practice of law (which he had studied at Union College) because of a feeling that it was dishonest.

In 1871, after a trip abroad, Bellamy joined the staff of the *New York Evening Post* and a year later transferred to the *Springfield Union*. For the next ten years he wrote short stories and novels for the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, and *Scribner's Magazine*. All of these are highly imaginative and fantastic tales of the sort in which the hero suddenly wakes up on the planet Mars or is shipwrecked on a Pacific island only to discover that all the natives are mind-readers. If one dips into these early productions, he will understand perfectly how William Dean Howells could have spoken of Bellamy as "rich in a romantic imagination surpassed only by Hawthorne." Bellamy's second novel, *The Duke of Stockbridge*, used Shay's Rebellion as its major theme, and here perhaps are to be found the remote beginnings of his interest in social criticism.

Meanwhile, he was at work upon another novel which was subsequently to become his *Looking Backward*. Originally he had no intention that this work should become a major critique of the society in

which he lived. He himself says of his project: "The idea was of a mere literary fantasy, a fairy tale of social felicity. There was no thought of contriving a house which practical men might live in but merely . . . a cloud palace for an ideal humanity." But curiously and by imperceptible stages the character of this work changed. Bellamy was somewhat in the position of the Fascist orator who, originally projecting a speech with all the cleverness of a propagandist, constructs it simply in order to stir up his populace, but in the course of its delivery becomes so hypnotized by his own words that at the end he is as honestly fanatic as the shouting crowd before him. At first, projecting a utopian society one hundred years into the future only in order to intrigue a literary public, as the mythical details of his ideal economic order came alive on paper, their rationality and concrete applicability began to overcome him until at last the literary craftsman was transformed into a serious economist with a plan. "Instead," said Bellamy himself, "of a mere fairy tale of social perfection, it became the vehicle of a definite scheme of industrial reorganization." *Looking Backward* was written in 1886 and was published in 1887. It was an immediate success. A month afterward it had sold two hundred thousand copies, and to date it has sold well over a million copies in the United States alone.

What was the secret of the success of Bellamy's great utopian novel? In approaching any example of utopian thought, there are at least three inquiries which might be of considerable value. In the first place, one might undertake a psychological analysis indicating the place of the utopian work in the life-scheme of the author and showing the way in which the conditions of his own

biography and family background were responsible for the orientation of his thought. In the second place, one might undertake a dialectical study, attempting to show the place of the utopia in the historic tradition of utopian thought, comparing it, for example, with such seminal documents as the *Republic* of Plato or the *Utopia* of Sir Thomas More and indicating in what respects it borrowed or departed from the great utopian tradition. A third method of approach would be the sociological. In this enterprise one would attempt to understand a utopian work by studying its relation to its social background—how it reflected or reacted against the social and economic conditions which obtained during its production and how it arose out of the social milieu within which it was created. Any of these three analyses could be justified. But in the case of *Looking Backward* I think we shall be most rewarded if we consider it primarily in terms of its sociological background.

Writing to the editor of the *Boston Transcript* with reference to a review of *Looking Backward* which had appeared in that paper on March 30, 1888, Bellamy said:

*Looking Backward*, although in form a fanciful romance, is intended in all seriousness as a forecast in accordance with the principles of evolution, of the next age in the industrial and social development of humanity, especially in this country; and no part of it is believed by the author to be better supported by the indications of probability than the implied prediction that the dawn of the new era is already near at hand, and that the full day will swiftly follow. Does this seem at first thought incredible in view of the vastness of the changes presupposed? What is the teaching of history, but that great national transformations, while ages in unnoticed preparation, when once inaugurated, are accomplished with a rapidity and resistless momentum proportioned to their magnitude,

not limited by it? . . . that this long stream of influence, ever widening and deepening, is at last about to sweep away the barriers it has so long sapped, is at least one obvious interpretation of the present universal ferment of men's minds as to the imperfections of present social arrangements. Not only are the toilers of the world engaged in something like a world-wide insurrection, but true and humane men and women of every degree, are in a mood of exasperation verging on absolute revolt against social conditions that reduce life to a brutal struggle for existence, mock every dictate of ethics and religion, and render well-nigh futile the efforts of philanthropy.

Exactly what was the nature of this "world-wide insurrection"? Whence sprang the "present universal ferment of men's minds as to the imperfections of social arrangements"?

There is a sense in which utopian literature is always a flight from chaos. Utopias have a particular success during times of social crisis, not only in that they express the wishful thinking and escape mechanisms of moments of profound social disorganization, but also in that they convey a necessary message of social hope. When society is, however, restored to some sort of equilibrium, utopian productions become somewhat less popular. The year 1887, in which *Looking Backward* was written, was known as "the year of ten thousand strikes." To what were these due? Edward Bellamy was born in 1850, and from this time up to the Civil War it could still be said that America was a nation with a frontier and an open land of opportunity. The government still provided land for homesteaders in the West, and it was still possible for dissatisfied elements in various parts of the country to move freely toward new economic enterprises. But with the Civil War came two events—first of all, the closing of the western frontier and, second, the great period of industrial expansion. In

1860 there were only three millionaires in the United States. By 1890 there were thirty-eight. This was the age of industrial opportunity. It marked the founding of the Southern Pacific, the Sante Fe, and the Northern Pacific railroads; Standard Oil, United States Steel, Amalgamated Copper, International Harvester, and the American Sugar and American Tobacco companies. It was the period of formation of the great monopolies and trusts in oil, beef, steel, and money. The tendency in the direction of huge combinations and monopolies not only was the product of a natural evolution of capitalist enterprise but grew out of the real advantages of increased productive efficiency which spring from large-scale undertakings. Andrew Carnegie said:

Two pounds of ironstone mined on Lake Superior and transported 900 miles to Pittsburgh; one and one-half pounds of coal, mined, manufactured into coke and transported to Pittsburgh; a small amount of manganese ore, mined in Virginia and brought to Pittsburgh—and these four pounds of material, manufactured into one pound of steel for which the consumer pays 1 cent.

This is typical of the lowered unit cost growing out of large-scale business enterprise.

The growth of large corporations brought with it not only tremendous profits for corporation executives and owners but also a wave of unrest among the laboring classes. Edward Bellamy could not help being struck by the concomitance of two things—first, the tendency toward business monopoly and, second, the increasingly hostile attitude of labor to capital. This latter was reflected in the great railroad strike of 1877, the Leadville coal strike of 1880, the Haymarket Riot of 1886, the Gould strike of 1884, and culminated in the Pullman strike of 1894. Between the years 1881

and 1906 there were over thirty-six thousand strikes and fifteen hundred lockouts, with a total of between six and nine million persons involved and, at some time or other, out of work. In response to the increasing friction between capital and labor there came the rise of an autonomous labor movement. The National Labor Union was formed in 1866; the Labor Knights of St. Crispin in 1867; the Knights of Labor, the most important of all, from which grew the American Federation of Labor, in 1869. And when in 1884 the Knights of Labor won the great railroad strike against Jay Gould the labor movement was already a power to be reckoned with.

It is only against this background that *Looking Backward* is to be understood—the background of the gigantic corporations like Standard Oil, United States Steel, and International Harvester, each capitalized at over fifty million dollars; the background of labor unrest culminating in a succession of devastating strikes; and the growth of unionism with its attendant battles between labor and the state police, which came to a head between 1877 and 1886. Only a few men saw the real meaning of this industrial conflagration. Among them were Henry George and Thorstein Veblen. And another of them was Edward Bellamy.

As has been suggested, utopian literature always tends to be in some sense a reflection of the times. It is a sociological as well as a merely literary phenomenon. Proof of this can be found in the fact that *Looking Backward*, although the most influential utopia of the period, was by no means the only one. Alfred Cridge had written a utopia in 1884, and Henry Allen had written one in 1886. Bellamy's was the third in point of time; but here is the interesting thing: In the sixteen years from 1884 to 1900, when the period



of industrial unrest was greatest, exactly forty-nine utopian novels were written. These utopias, together with Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, have certain characteristics in common. Speaking generally, all of them consider the problem of society in economic terms. All, or the majority of them, solve the social problem socialistically or communistically. Most of the men who write these utopias come from the upper ranks of society, and the appeal which they make is basically an appeal to the middle classes for nonviolent change. They are predominantly suspicious of revolutionary technique, and they have a profound distrust equally of the ruthless captains of industry and of the ignorant labor agitators. It is really in the genteel middle-class tradition that they attempt to solve the problem of social chaos.

*Looking Backward*, the title of Bellamy's utopia, is, of course, a misnomer. It should actually have been entitled *Looking Forward*. What Bellamy tried to do was to paint a picture of a utopian economic society existing in the year 2000 and, by a contrast between this society and that of his own times, to indicate the direction of a necessary social change. What is primarily interesting here from the point of view of utopian analysis is the fact that Bellamy's utopia takes place in an actual location—Boston—in the year 2000. This is significant against the background of utopian possibilities in general.

Fundamentally, there are two kinds of utopias—spatial utopias and temporal utopias. It was characteristic of the great utopian productions of the Renaissance, of Thomas More's *Utopia* and Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, for example, that they should be set co-temporally with the lives of their authors but in some far distant part of space. These utopias

express the spirit of the voyages of discovery and the Renaissance consciousness of an expanding spatial universe. Temporal utopias (which, strictly speaking, ought to be called "uchronias"), in contrast with spatial utopias, derive their utopian character from the fact that the scene is set at a time other than that of the life of the author. These utopias can be of two sorts—they may be backward looking or they may be forward looking. It was characteristic of Greek utopian thought that it should be essentially conservative and backward looking, that it should appeal to principles of social perfection exemplified in a previous Golden Age. It is in this sense that Plato's references to the lost island of Atlantis in the *Timaeus* are to be understood. *Looking Backward* is, however, a utopia looking forward in time. It is a time-utopia built upon a doctrine of social progress and consequently an expression of the whole tradition of progress as this was stated in the eighteenth century and popularized in the nineteenth.

The plot of *Looking Backward* is, of course, well known. The legend is that the hero, Julian West, falls asleep in Boston on the evening of May 30, 1887, and wakes up in the same city one hundred and thirteen years later, on September 10 in the year 2000, in the backyard of Dr. Leete, an inhabitant of that time. How he discusses with Dr. Leete and with the latter's daughter, Edith, the social changes which have taken place in the mythical one hundred and thirteen years forms the somewhat didactic body of the narrative.

In the author's Preface, dated December 26 of the year 2000, Bellamy says:

Living as we do in the closing year of the twentieth century, enjoying the blessings of a

social order at once so simple and logical that it seems but the triumph of common sense, it is no doubt difficult for those whose studies have not been largely historical to realize that the present organization of society is in its completeness less than a century old. . . . The object of this volume is to assist persons who, while desiring to gain a more definite idea of the social contrasts between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, are daunted by the formal aspect of the histories which treat the subject. Warned by a teacher's experience that learning is accounted a weariness to the flesh, the author has sought to alleviate the instructive quality of the book by casting it in the form of a romantic narrative which he would be glad to fancy not wholly devoid of interest on its own account.

What was the nature of this "social order at once so simple and logical that it seems but the triumph of common sense"? At the very beginning, Bellamy paints the contrast between the Boston of 1887, as he knew it, and the happier world of his projection in a famous metaphor which is worthy of complete quotation:

By way of attempting to give the reader some general impression of the way people lived together in those days [the United States of 1887], and especially of the relations of the rich and poor to one another, perhaps I cannot do better than to compare society as it then was to a prodigious coach which the masses of humanity were harnessed to and dragged toilsomely along a very hilly and sandy road. The driver was hunger, and permitted no lagging, though the pace was necessarily very slow. Despite the difficulty of drawing the coach at all along so hard a road, the top was covered with passengers who never got down, even at the steepest ascents. These seats on top were very breezy and comfortable. Well up out of the dust, their occupants could enjoy the scenery at their leisure, or critically discuss the merits of the straining team. Naturally such places were in great demand and the competition for them was keen, every one seeking as the first end in life to secure a seat on the coach for himself and to leave it to his child after him. By the rule of the coach a man could leave his seat to whom he wished, but on the other hand there were many accidents by which it might at any time be

wholly lost. For all that they were so easy, the seats were very insecure, and at every sudden jolt of the coach persons were slipping out of them and falling to the ground, where they were instantly compelled to take hold of the rope and help to drag the coach on which they had before ridden so pleasantly. It was naturally regarded as a terrible misfortune to lose one's seat, and the apprehension that this might happen to them or their friends was a constant cloud upon the happiness of those who rode.

But did they think only of themselves? you ask. Was not their very luxury rendered intolerable to them by comparison with the lot of their brothers and sisters in the harness, and the knowledge that their own weight added to their toil? Had they no compassion for fellow beings from whom fortune only distinguished them? Oh, yes; commiseration was frequently expressed by those who rode for those who had to pull the coach, especially when the vehicle came to a bad place in the road, as it was constantly doing, or to a particularly steep hill. At such times, the desperate straining of the team, their agonized leaping and plunging under the pitiless lashing of hunger, the many who fainted at the rope and were tramped in the mire, made a very distressing spectacle, which often called forth highly creditable displays of feeling on the top of the coach. At such times the passengers would call down encouragingly to the toilers of the rope, exhorting them to patience, and holding out hopes of possible compensation in another world for the hardness of their lot, while others contributed to buy salves and liniments for the crippled and injured. It was agreed that it was a great pity that the coach should be so hard to pull, and there was a sense of general relief when the specially bad piece of road was gotten over. This relief was not, indeed, wholly on account of the team, for there was always some danger at these bad places of a general overturn in which all would lose their seats.

It must in truth be admitted that the main effect of the spectacle of the misery of the toilers at the rope was to enhance the passengers' sense of the value of their seats upon the coach, and to cause them to hold on to them more desperately than before. If the passengers could only have felt assured that neither they nor their friends would ever fall from the top, it is probable that, beyond contributing to the funds for liniments and bandages, they would have troubled themselves extremely little about those who dragged the coach.

I am well aware that this will appear to the men and women of the twentieth century an incredible inhumanity, but there are two facts, both very curious, which partly explain it. In the first place, it was firmly and sincerely believed that there was no other way in which Society could get along, except the many pulled at the rope and the few rode, and not only this, but that no very radical improvement even was possible, either in the harness, the coach, the roadway, or the distribution of the toil. It had always been as it was, and it always would be so. It was a pity, but it could not be helped, and philosophy forbade wasting compassion on what was beyond remedy.

The other fact is yet more curious, consisting in a singular hallucination which those on the top of the coach generally shared, that they were not exactly like their brothers and sisters who pulled at the rope, but of finer clay, in some way belonging to a higher order of beings who might justly expect to be drawn. This seems unaccountable, but, as I once rode on this very coach and shared that very hallucination, I ought to be believed. The strangest thing about the hallucination was that those who had but just climbed up from the ground, before they had outgrown the marks of the rope upon their hands, began to fall under its influence. As for those whose parents and grandparents before them had been so fortunate as to keep their seats on the top, the conviction they cherished of the essential difference between their sort of humanity and the common article was absolute. The effect of such a delusion in moderating fellow feeling for the sufferings of the mass of men into a distant and philosophical compassion is obvious. To it I refer as the only extenuation I can offer for the indifference which, at the period I write of, marked my own attitude toward the misery of my brothers.

In this passage Bellamy shows clearly in imaginative metaphor the paradox of a society based upon a rigid class division and consisting of a laboring-class majority which must exist at a level of underconsumption in order that a leisure-class minority may exist in a zone of overconsumption. And he calls attention also to the two chief rationalizations which are utilized for the preservation of the status quo—the first, the belief that there is no

possible alternative to an inequitable distribution of wealth and, the second, the belief that inequality is justified on the grounds that those in the superior class owe their status to qualities of personal worth and merit.

In a further analysis Bellamy persuasively identifies the source of the conflict of interest between capital and labor existing in the society of his time. It is his point that such conflict is inevitable, as a result of large concentrations of capital in an economic order dominated by the profit motive. In such an economic order, there is an unavoidable conflict between the laborer trying to maximize his wages at the expense of employer profits, and the capitalist trying to maximize his profits at the expense of the wages of his workers. But any natural adjustment of this conflict is prevented by the inequalities of the two conflicting parties; for the tremendous power of the great corporation has dwarfed into insignificance the bargaining-power of the workers! At those times when business is small, the individual workman is a person of importance and independence and, since but little capital is necessary for production, can, if he has initiative, engage in business enterprise on his own. With the rise of great capital aggregations and the consequent decrease in opportunity for the small man, the multitudes, whether workers or consumers, are fated to exist in a form of servitude to the huge corporations. In the great tendency to monopoly growing out of a technology in which capital is proved productively efficient in proportion to its concentration, the worker and the little businessman are crushed. What must of necessity be the social reformer's answer to this situation?

Bellamy saw clearly that the concentration of industrial enterprise in large



aggregates was indeed the condition of productive efficiency in an advancing technological society. His answer was not, therefore, against the consolidation of productive enterprise as such but was directed toward the question of the moral and social purpose which this consolidation must serve. He therefore presents the stock answer of the utopian socialist. Let there be a complete consolidation of capital and productive enterprise, but let it exist not in private hands and for private profit but in public hands and for public benefit! Bellamy is not a critic of the practice of monopoly as such; he is simply in favor of the transformation of all private monopolies into public monopolies. From his point of view the nation as a whole should be organized into one great business corporation in which the state is the sole capitalist, the sole monopolist, and the sole employer. It is customary in a democracy to distinguish between economics and politics and to consider the former as private business and the latter as public business. Bellamy, however, suggests that no business is so essentially the public business as the livelihood of its individual citizens. There was a time, indeed, in which politics was the private business of the monarch. And, just as the kings prior to the American Revolution demonstrated the moral that politics must be taken over from private hands and placed in public, so analogously, reasons Bellamy, the great corporations teach the lesson that matters of economic concern must likewise be transferred. The question which at once occurs is this: Is there any guaranty that economic enterprise will be carried on for the public benefit if it is placed in the hands of politicians and public officers rather than left in the hands of private owners and managers? And to this very real question

Bellamy replies that the only solution is so to design social institutions that it will be impossible for such public managers and officers to abuse their trust.

In Bellamy's utopian state is provided not only a national organization of capital but likewise a national organization of labor under unified direction. Universal compulsory labor service (analogous to the universal military service of certain Continental countries) would be required. Individuals are to be educated for the first twenty-one years of their life, but from the age of twenty-one to the age of forty-five their compulsory labor service is demanded. In times of special emergency the director of public service may call upon persons of the ages of forty-five to fifty-five, but at the age of fifty-five there is compulsory retirement for all. The bondage of compulsory labor service is considerably mitigated by the fact that all individuals will have a voluntary choice of occupation, but, having chosen, they have certain obligations with respect to vocational training and preparation. It is the function of the administrators of the state to mediate between the conflicting choices of individuals and to regulate the relative attractiveness of certain occupations by proportioning the hours of labor and the status to be derived from different occupations to the actual demand for such services within the society. In the well-organized state the most difficult and unattractive occupations will have the shortest hours of labor and the greatest amount of prestige.

One of the most important consequences of the setting-up of a national organization of capital and labor is the abolition of the occupations of trade and banking. All organized market activities, such as the competitive bidding for products and the attempt to influence con-

sumer demand through industrial advertising, will be given up. All consumer distribution will be made from a single national storehouse. Bellamy's mechanism here is very simple. Each individual would be given a credit card representing his share of the annual product at the *beginning* of each year. Consumer goods would be manufactured and stored at public warehouses, and the consumer would have immediate access to these centers of distribution. It goes without saying that consumers would be given such information about the content and quality of various products as would enable them to make wise choices. There would be a complete system of grade labeling for consumer goods and (owing to the central system of distribution) the elimination of all profit and all middlemen. Many of the productive functions previously performed within the bosom of the individual family would now become socialized. There would be washing at public laundries, cooking at public kitchens, and, for those who did not wish to retain the social aspects of the home, eating at public lunchrooms.

The annual credit for each individual would be fixed for the year and would be nontransferable. In direct consequence of this type of distributive system, buying and selling would be considered anti-social acts. If any individual's consumer wants were less than his annual credit, any surplus credit which existed at the end of the year would be turned back automatically to the general credit. In such a society it is clear that there would no longer be any incentive toward capital accumulation, and individual saving would no longer have the status of a moral virtue. This would be true because the utopian state (no longer as in our own liberal and individualistic society merely the framework of order regulat-

ing the motives and the actions of private enterprise, but actually being a social-service state) would secure its citizens against the future through complete provision for education and social security from the cradle to the grave.

A serious critic might ask: In such a society what of the problem of human motivation? Any society must have a division of labor and many occupations necessary for the welfare of the whole. With such a division of labor how is the remuneration of the individual to be fixed? With the abolition of the monetary standard what method remains for determining the relative value of services? Bellamy's answer is simply that the old system of payment in terms of a rate determined in the market place is no longer feasible. Such a system of remuneration is the only possible one where the motivations of individuals are in conflict with one another. But, as previously suggested, the paradox of a competitive society is that the most difficult and dangerous types of work are given the scantiest rewards. In the utopian state, however, all are to get the same wages because all are required to make the same effort. The question at issue here is not primarily a material one but a moral one!

But the fundamental question still remains. Is it not true, human nature being what it is, that the individual works only for monetary reward? Is it possible for this basic characteristic of human beings to be changed? The answer which Bellamy gives is a categorical "Yes." It is true, of course, that some principle of motivation must be appealed to. On the other hand, one must be blind to the lesson of history (as indicated by a study of aristocratic or feudal societies) to believe that the only possible type of motivation is the financial. Cannot personal honor

be appealed to as well as greed? Do soldiers fight in time of war only for the pay which they receive? Clearly not! And just as any military organization has a morale and an *esprit de corps*, independent of pecuniary considerations, so may an entire society. Bellamy's state does not require an army of soldiers, but it does require the principles of military organization and motivation for an army of industry.

Bellamy's "industrial army" would consist of a number of different ranks. First, there would be the lowest and unclassified grade of common laborer; next, there would be those who are serving an apprenticeship before entering upon their life-careers; and, finally, there would be those who had achieved the status of full workmen. Distinctions would be made within each of these classes on the basis of degree of competency. And in order to prevent the system from becoming rigid and stratified, there would be periodic regrading of the members of the industrial army, insuring mobility from rank to rank. There would be many small rewards and incentives to promotion which would encourage a socially valuable ambition on the part of the working population.

One of the most serious needs of such a society would be for long-range economic planning. Bellamy asserts the need for estimating the demand for all staple commodities at least one year in advance (less preplanning being necessary in the case of luxuries). This estimated demand would be the basis of the production schedule for the state's basic industries. In such a society the price mechanism and the principle of consumer demand would be retained, although price would be determined essentially by labor cost rather than by money cost. This would imply (1) that articles of

small demand would have a high price and (2) that new products could still be introduced through the circulation of petitions by those interested in obtaining them. Also a large surplus of staple commodities would be kept on hand in order to meet unforeseen contingencies of demand in the economic situation. It would, of course, be impossible to maintain any single nation on such a basis irrespective of the economy of the world at large. But Bellamy's utopia assumes that there will be a Federal Union with an international council to regulate the relations between the member-states. Each nation will have a bureau of foreign exchange, which will regulate and manage its foreign trade. There will be unrestricted immigration, and all principles of foreign policy will point to the eventual unification of the world as one great single nation.

Having described the general economic structure of the state, Bellamy proceeds to the construction of its political machinery. His political system still depends upon the military analogy. There will be captains, colonels, and generals for the army of laborers. The highest superintendent of all will be the president of the society. This man must be fifty years old in order to be elected and will serve no more than five years (Republicans please note!). Since no personal wealth exists in the state, corruption due to bribery will be impossible. Adequate provision will be made so that those in the liberal professions (medicine and teaching, for example) will not be members of the general industrial army but will belong to guilds of their own, controlled primarily by boards of their own choosing.

Such a society, according to Bellamy, will be free of the usual types of social disorganization and maladjustment.

There will be no prisons because crime will vanish with the appearance of economic equality. If theft were to exist in such a state, it would be a pathological condition on the level of kleptomania. Lying, too, would be a thing of the past, since lying itself grows primarily out of economic fear and the hope of fraudulent reward. In exactly the same way, there will be no further need for a highly organized body of law or, indeed, for any but the most rudimentary form of judicial system. The increased power of the executive branch of government will mean a corresponding decrease in the functions of the judicial, on the one hand, and the legislative, on the other. A representative congress will still remain in existence, but this congress will meet only once in five years (even now by some a consummation devoutly to be wished!). The reduction of power of congress will not be due to any lessening of the democratic principle but rather to a change in the relation between the economic and the political functions of the state. Let Bellamy explain this himself.

“But with no state legislatures and congress meeting only once in five years, how do you get your legislation done?”

“We have no legislation,” replied Dr. Leete. “That is, next to none. It is rarely that congress, even when it meets, considers any new laws of consequence, and then it only has power to commend them to the following congress lest anything be done hastily. If you will consider a moment, Mr. West, you will see that we have nothing to make laws about. The fundamental principles on which our society is founded settled for all time the strifes and misunderstandings which in your day called for legislation. Fully ninety-nine one-hundredths of the laws of that time concerned the definition and protection of private property and the relations of buyers and sellers. There is neither private property, beyond personal belongings, now nor buying and selling. And, therefore, the occasion of nearly all the legislation formerly necessary has passed away. Formerly society was a pyra-

mid poised on its apex. All the gravitations of human nature were constantly tending to topple it over, and it could be maintained upright or, rather upwrought (if you will pardon the feeble witticism) by an elaborate system of constantly renewed props and buttresses and guyropes in the form of laws. A central congress and forty state legislatures turning out some twenty thousand laws a year could not make new props fast enough to take the place of those which were constantly breaking down or becoming ineffectual through some shifting of the strain. Now society rests on its base and is in as little need of artificial supports as the everlasting hills.”

Having outlined the structure of the utopian state, Bellamy proceeds in the words of Dr. Leete to present his basic criticisms of the nineteenth-century industrial order. Having spoken of the waste which comes from leaving the conduct of industry to individuals, the waste which comes through mistaken economic undertakings, the waste which comes through overproduction and depressions, and the waste which comes (as so many of our modern economists have insisted) from idle capital and idle labor during periods of unemployment, Bellamy proceeds to a treatment of what is for him the primary waste of all, namely, that from competition and the hostility which competition engenders.

The next of the great wastes was that from competition. The field of industry was a battlefield as wide as the world in which the workers wasted, in assailing one another, energies which, if expended in concerted effort as today, would have enriched all. As for mercy or quarter in this warfare, there was absolutely no suggestion of it. To deliberately enter a field of business and destroy the enterprises of those who had occupied it previously in order to plant one's own enterprise on their ruins was an achievement which never failed to command popular admiration; nor is there any stretch of fancy in comparing this sort of struggle with actual warfare so far as concerns the mental agony and physical suffering which attended the struggle and the misery which overwhelmed the de-

feated and those dependent upon them. Nothing about your age is at first sight more astounding to a man of modern times than the fact that men engaged in the same industry, instead of fraternizing as comrades and collaborators to a common end, should have regarded each other as rivals and enemies to be throttled and overthrown. This certainly seems like sheer madness, a scene from bedlam.

As illustrated above, one of the most striking features of *Looking Backward* is the way in which Bellamy treats industrial competition, not primarily as an economic problem but as a moral one. It is characteristic of him that this should be so. I have spoken before about the importance of his Baptist background, and it is true that throughout his life he was dominated by the problem of how the moral principles of Christianity might be made socially effective.

Any reformer with an ardent desire to reconstruct the social order may begin in either of two ways. On the one hand, he may approach the problem through the inner life and concentrate his efforts upon the reformation of the character of the individual. This is the motivation which was predominant among the Stoics and certain of the earliest Christian leaders. The other type of social reformer makes his approach in terms of social institutions. He does not emphasize personal motivation, but he attempts to design new social arrangements which shall be mechanically more perfect than those which tradition or accident have brought into existence. Bellamy is a curious combination of both approaches. On the one hand, he does deal with the problem of social reconstruction from an institutional point of view, but, on the other hand, he shared with Rousseau the belief that human nature is itself essentially good and needs only the construction of an economic and social

environment congenial to its fullest expression.

The great moral change from the nineteenth century to the world projected in *Looking Backward* is primarily a change in which rational self-interest is replaced by rational unselfishness. It is a change in which the everlasting fight between morality and economic need has been resolved in such a fashion that both the satisfaction of economic wants and the expression of the best moral qualities can coexist. Bellamy indicates clearly that he himself is guided by Christian moral assumptions and that the basic characteristics of the social structure of the nineteenth century are antagonistic to these principles. A sermon delivered by a clergyman in Bellamy's utopian society makes this abundantly clear:

Although the idea of the vital unity of the family of mankind, the reality of human brotherhood, was very far from being apprehended by them as the moral axiom it seems to us, yet it is a mistake to suppose that there was no feeling at all corresponding to it. I could read you passages of great beauty from some of their writers which show that the conception was clearly attained by a few, and no doubt vaguely by many more. Moreover, it must not be forgotten that the nineteenth century was in name Christian, and the fact that the entire commercial and industrial frame of society was the embodiment of the anti-Christian spirit must have had some weight, though I admit it was strangely little, with the nominal followers of Jesus Christ.

When we inquire why it did not have more, why, in general, long after a vast majority of men had agreed as to the crying abuses of the existing social arrangement, they still tolerated it, or contented themselves with talking of petty reforms in it, we come upon an extraordinary fact. It was the sincere belief of even the best of men at that epoch that the only stable elements in human nature, on which a social system could be safely founded, were its worst propensities. They had been taught and believed that greed and self-seeking were all that



held mankind together, and that all human associations would fall to pieces if anything were done to blunt the edge of these motives or curb their operation. In a word, they believed—even those who longed to believe otherwise—the exact reverse of what seems to us self-evident; they believed, that is, that the anti-social qualities of men, and not their social qualities, were what furnished the cohesive force of society. It seemed reasonable to them that men lived together solely for the purpose of overreaching and oppressing one another, and of being overreached and oppressed, and that while a society that gave full scope to these propensities could stand, there would be little chance for one based on the idea of cooperation for the benefit of all. It seems absurd to expect any one to believe that convictions like these were ever seriously entertained by men; but that they were not only entertained by our great-grandfathers, but were responsible for the long delay in doing away with the ancient order, after a conviction of its intolerable abuses had become general, is as well established as any fact in history can be. Just here you will find the explanation of the profound pessimism of the literature of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the note of melancholy in its poetry, and the cynicism of its humor.

In this passage Bellamy expresses his belief not only in the essential goodness of the human person but likewise in the possibility of founding a community in which the best side of human personality has an opportunity to flourish. The concluding words of the sermon previously referred to contain the famous metaphor in which this is most effectively expressed:

To put the whole matter in the nutshell of a parable, let me compare humanity in the olden time to a rosebush planted in a swamp, watered with black bog-water, breathing miasmatic fogs by day, and chilled with poison dews at night. Innumerable generations of gardeners had done their best to make it bloom, but beyond an occasional half-opened bud with a worm at the heart, their efforts had been unsuccessful. Many, indeed, claimed that the bush was no rosebush at all, but a noxious shrub, fit only to be uprooted and burned. The gardeners, for the most part, however, held that the bush

belonged to the rose family, but had some ineradicable taint about it, which prevented the buds from coming out, and accounted for its generally sickly condition. There were a few indeed, who maintained that the stock was good enough, that the trouble was in the bog, and that under more favorable conditions the plant might be expected to do better. But these persons were not regular gardeners, and being condemned by the latter as mere theorists and day dreamers, were, for the most part, so regarded by the people. Moreover, urged some eminent moral philosophers, even conceding for the sake of the argument that the bush might possibly do better elsewhere, it was a more valuable discipline for the buds to try to bloom in a bog than it would be under more favorable conditions. The buds that succeeded in opening might indeed be very rare, and the flowers pale and scentless, but they represented far more moral effort than if they had bloomed spontaneously in a garden.

The regular gardeners and the moral philosophers had their way. The bush remained rooted in the bog, and the old course of treatment went on. Continually new varieties of forcing mixtures were applied to the roots and more recipes than could be numbered, each declared by its advocates the best and only suitable preparation, were used to kill the vermin and remove the mildew. This went on a very long time. Occasionally some one claimed to observe a slight improvement in the appearance of the bush, but there were quite as many who declared that it did not look so well as it used to. On the whole there could not be said to be any marked change. Finally, during a period of general despondency as to the prospects of the bush where it was, the idea of transplanting it was again mooted, and this time found favor. "Let us try it," was the general voice. "Perhaps it may thrive better elsewhere, and here it is certainly doubtful if it be worth cultivating longer." So it came about that the rosebush of humanity was transplanted, and set in sweet warm, dry earth, where the sun bathed it, the stars wooed it, and the south wind caressed it. Then it appeared that it was indeed a rosebush. The vermin and the mildew disappeared, and the bush was covered with most beautiful red roses, whose fragrance filled the world.

The society projected in *Looking Backward* is indeed a radical departure from

the social organization of the latter part of the nineteenth century and of our own time, but it is evident that Bellamy's radicalism did not spring from a simple delight in change for its own sake.

It is not possible here to criticize Bellamy's ideas in any detail. But it is true that for the social philosopher *Looking Backward* raises certain interesting questions. The basic issues which Bellamy treats are not only timely but recurrent. They are essentially the issues (1) of private monopoly versus public monopoly; (2) of competition versus co-operation; and (3) of the motive of private profit versus the motive of public service. Bellamy has proposed a society in which in each case the former has been supplanted by the latter. And there are fundamentally two trends which he has attempted to further. The first is the trend away from a society characterized by a basic conflict of interest between various pressure groups and toward a society unified by a common purpose in which there is a coincidence of interests; and, second, the trend away from "the police state," which is simply a framework of order, and toward the "social-service state," which should have the function of securing the total welfare of the citizenry as a whole.

To the men of Bellamy's own day, *Looking Backward* was not merely a hopelessly unrealistic suggestion. It is true that Henry George, a competent economist in his own right, in reviewing *Looking Backward* in the *Standard* for August 31, 1889, called it "a castle in the air with clouds for a foundation." But this opinion was by no means shared by all of Bellamy's contemporaries. In 1888 a number of enthusiastic Bostonians formed "The Boston Bellamy Club" with a publication, the *Nationalist*. It

was a reform paper with an anti-Marxist bias, which functioned as a real native American critique of capitalism. Subsequently, Nationalist clubs were founded in other leading cities in the United States, and the movement reached its peak in 1891 with the existence of 167 such organizations.

From a literary point of view, *Looking Backward* is a curious mixture. On the one hand, one cannot deny the awkwardness and pretentiousness of its nineteenth-century fictional style. But, on the other hand, where Bellamy is actually defending the institutions which he proposes, the reader is beautifully carried along and the problems become eminently real and engrossing. One can agree with William Dean Howells in speaking of "the art which Bellamy had in degree so singular that one might call it supremely his. He does not so much transmute our everyday reality to the substance of romance as make the airy stuff of dreams one in quality with veritable experience." But even more important than Bellamy's quality as a social novelist is the directness of his passion as a social reformer and the honesty of his belief in the rights of the common man. Howells also said with great truth: "Somehow, whether he knew or not, he unerringly felt how the average man would feel, and all the webs of fancy that he wove were essentially of one texture through this sympathy. His imagination was intensely democratic. It was inalienably plebian, even, that is to say, humane."

It is for precisely this reason, I think, that Bellamy himself might have sat for President Conant's portrait of the American Radical, and that *Looking Backward* could through so many years remain the model of an American dream!

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