

CHAPTER IX

WHAT IS SLAVERY?

IN what does the slavery of our time consist? What are the forces that make some people the slaves of others? If we ask all the workers in Russia and in Europe and in America—alike in the factories and in various situations in which they work for hire, in towns and villages—what has made them choose the position in which they are living, they will all reply that they have been brought to it; either because they had no land on which they could and wished to live and work (that will be the reply of all the Russian workmen and of very many of the Europeans), or that taxes, direct and indirect, were demanded of them, which they could only pay by selling their labour, or that they remain at factory work ensnared by the more luxurious habits they have adopted, and which they can gratify only by selling their labour and their liberty.

The two first conditions—the lack of land and the taxes—drive man to compulsory labour,

while the third—his increased and unsatisfied needs—decoy him to it and keep him at it.

We can imagine that the land may be freed from the claims of private proprietors, by Henry George's plan, and that, therefore, the first cause driving people into slavery—the lack of land—may be done away with. We can also, besides the Single-Tax plan, imagine the direct abolition of taxes, or that they should be transferred from the poor to the rich, as is being done now in some countries; but, under the present economic organisation, one cannot even imagine a position of things under which more and more luxurious, and often harmful, habits of life would not be adopted among the rich, and that these habits should not, little by little, pass to those of the lower classes who are in contact with the rich, as inevitably as water sinks into dry ground, and that these habits should not become so necessary to the workers that, in order to be able to satisfy them, they will be ready to sell their freedom.

So that this third condition, though it is a voluntary one (*i.e.* it would seem that a man might resist the temptation), and though science does not acknowledge it to be a cause of the miserable condition of the workers, is the firmest and most irremovable cause of slavery.

Workmen living near rich people always are infected with new requirements, and only obtain

means to satisfy these requirements in so far as they devote their most intense labour to this satisfaction. So that workmen in England and America, receiving sometimes ten times as much as is necessary for subsistence, continue to be just such slaves as they were before.

Three causes, as the workmen themselves explain, produce the slavery in which they live; and the history of their enslavement and the facts of their position confirm the correctness of this explanation.

All the workers are brought to their present state, and are kept in it, by these three causes. These causes, acting on people from different sides, are such that none can escape from their enslavement. The agriculturist who has no land, or who has not enough, will always be obliged to go into perpetual or temporary slavery to the landowner, in order to have the possibility of feeding himself from the land. Should he, in one way or other, obtain land enough to be able to feed himself from it by his own labour, such taxes, direct or indirect, are demanded from him, that in order to pay them he has again to go into slavery.

If to escape from slavery on the land, he ceases to cultivate land, and, living on someone else's land, begins to occupy himself with a handicraft, and to exchange his produce for the things he needs, then, on the one hand, taxes, and, on

the other hand, the competition of capitalists, producing similar articles to those he makes, but with better implements of production, compel him to go into temporary or perpetual slavery to a capitalist. If working for a capitalist, he might set up free relations with him, and not be obliged to sell his liberty, yet the new requirements which he assimilates deprive him of any such possibility. So that, one way or another, the labourer is always in slavery to those who control the taxes, the land, and the articles necessary to satisfy his requirements.