

CHAPTER VII

THE MASTER PASSION OF DEMOCRACY

I

Illusions

THE story of the social unrest cannot be told without reference to those motives which underlie its practical methods. At the heart of all socialistic aspiration is some conception of equality. At the heart of the larger labor movement is the race longing for a society in which at least the spirit of equality shall be realized. Most radical remedies are only means to this end. Beyond, and deeper than all the machinery of social reconstruction, is this master passion of democracy.

Henry George did not give his life for a system of taxation. He worked for thirty years with rare and high devotion to convert the world to his "single tax," but wholly beyond this was the thing he cared for; the larger equality which he believed the single tax would usher in. There is no sect of socialists of which this is not likewise true. Their several schemes stand only as means to this larger end of a more equal life. Is this dream, as so many tell us, a discredited absurdity?

Those who have written most persuasively in favor of equality have been moved to expression by the

violent and flaunting inequalities amidst which they lived. Rousseau and Godwin, the aristocratic St. Simon and the democratic Fourier, down to recent writers, like Zola and Tolstoi, are sore and angry before the fact that those who have too little and those who have too much so jostle each other along the highway of a common life. Almost more is it a source of irritation that those who are not in want are prone to excuse these extremes as natural, unavoidable, and even desirable. Godwin wrote this sentence, "The human mind is incredibly subtle in inventing an apology for that to which its inclination leads."

The prejudice of interest and of temperament rarely shows itself with more complacent confidence than in most discussions on that world-old dream of the democracy, equality. In the days when the tory hatred of Gladstone was so acrid that it was thought to be bad form to mention his name at a dinner table, I asked a wise Englishman what reason could be given for a bitterness so excessive. "Those who hate him," he answered, "cannot give reasons, or if they do, there is no consistency among them. You will notice that vituperation takes the place of argument. When Gladstone is gone, it will be seen by all that his rank is without dispute among the half dozen of the greatest statesmen England has produced. My own interpretation of the abhorrence in which the well-bred world professes to hold him, is that it sees in him a very terrible enemy to those property rights on which our social inequality rests. Not that Gladstone means this, or is conscious of it, but his enemies see in him a most redoubtable

champion of the coming democracy, and hate him accordingly." This exposition may be defective, but it illustrates the unreasoning passions that are kindled when interests for which men most care are put in danger.

No subject is more beset by disturbing bias or class jealousy than equality. Much of the literature that extenuates inequalities exhibits a certain irritation, as if the author were arguing against one who had affronted him. This perversity of misunderstanding is epitomized in the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Lincoln came again and again to the famous equality clause of the Declaration, "All men are created equal," etc. From the astute Douglas to the pettiest demagogue of proslavery politics, Lincoln was harassed because of his defence of equality. With his incomparable lucidity of statement, he tells the public what he means. He does not mean equal in all respects; color, stature, moral and intellectual gifts, are indefinitely variable, but deeper than this difference lies a basis of equality, absolute and impregnable. "There is," said Lincoln, "no reason in the world why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence; the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I hold that he is as much entitled to these as the white man. I agree with Judge Douglas that he is not my equal in many respects—certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment. But in the right to eat the bread, without the leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns, he is my equal, and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living

man." In passages like this, it is made fearlessly clear that the great democrat is not arguing for impossible equalities; clear, that he understands, as well as his opponent, what a gamut of superior and inferior qualities inhere in the race, and forever will inhere. But these repeated explanations of Lincoln, except to far-off and disinterested readers of the speeches, were fruitless. Once insisting upon the great principle of equality, no qualifications that he could make before an audience weighed in the balance against the insolent substitute for argument, "Will you marry a nigger?" "Will you invite 'em to dinner?" Stung by the persistent unfairness, Lincoln replied, "Anything that argues me into his (Douglas's) idea of perfect social and political equality with the negro is but a specious and fantastic arrangement of words by which a man can prove a horse-chestnut to be a chestnut horse."

This sentence summarizes the interminable attempts that have been made to prove that the dream of the democracy is mere fatuity. The explanation of this is easier, because few subjects, if interpreted with any literalness, are so open to attack and to raillery. If there is one fact about which human experience can have an absolute opinion, it is the fact of diversity and inequality of gifts. Nor is there a sign that this diversity and inequality are being extinguished. There are signs that they tend uniformly to deepen with each new stage of progress. Certain it is that nature loves variety no less than unity, and greets each new difference in her unfolding life with delight and approval.

It is a measure of our culture to shrink from

monotony and rejoice in variation. I read a vapid imitation of Bellamy, in which none were to be physically more beautiful than others. The very sense and source of beauty would thus expire. A world in which at a given moment none are better, braver, more gracious, more eloquent or more masterful than others, presents a sorry spectacle to the imagination. It is open to doubt, but I fancy that a society which insisted upon apportioning exact property equivalents would affront the common sense of any well-developed race. A race that has become both strong and kind, would be eager that property should go according to needs and to gifts. As these varied, the use of property would vary.

If, then, our discussion is to begin with these admissions of inevitable inequality, what remains for argument? The whole practical question is, I believe, untouched by any of these concessions. Lincoln's phrase, "specious and fantastic arrangement of words," as applied to equality, was never more in fashion than now. Many an uncompromising defender of society, as now organized, is quick to make merry over every suggestion of equality.

There is some excuse for this, if the word be taken narrowly, or if many of the past interpretations of equality be accepted. If, on the contrary, we are willing to take the word at its best, take it as it is now used even by the broader-minded of the socialist writers, the notion of equality presents no paralyzing difficulty whatever. The better to establish this fact, let us look first at the narrower meaning and at the illusions with which the word has been associated.

So many graphic efforts have been made in this

country to force an artificial uniformity, that the attention has been diverted from the essential spirit of equal privilege. Perhaps the history of no people offers so great a variety of picturesque attempts to realize social equality as the United States during the nineteenth century. The century opens with the election of a chief magistrate consecrated to this end. No sooner was Jefferson in office than he began to practise *la vie égalitaire*, the ideals of which so fascinated him in France. In 1801, he proclaimed his purpose to efface, at his receptions and at his table, every form of class distinction. All rules of precedence, hitherto customary, were to be set aside. This was the famous *pêle-mêle* that so enraged the British minister. The general dismay was at its height in 1804, when Jefferson wrote privately to Monroe, "We have told him (the English minister) that the principle of society as well as of government with us is the equality of the individuals composing it; that no man here would come to a dinner where he was to be marked with inferiority to any other; that we might as well attempt to force our principle of equality at St. James's as he his principle of precedence here." The British minister wrote home that the foreign representatives and their wives "are now placed here in a situation so degrading to the countries they represent, and so personally disagreeable to themselves, as to become almost intolerable." The French minister wrote to Talleyrand that "all Washington was turned upside down." It is not probable that an abler or a more sincere and honest trial of "the equal life" among the functions at the Capitol, could ever be made than that which

was made by Jefferson under his "Canons of Etiquette," that had the formal approval of his Cabinet.

The experiment, however, left as little trace as any of the hundred Utopias that have been tried in our country. The failure came, not because foreign ambassadors treated it with ridicule and disdain, but because our own people did not continue to like it, more than the foreigners liked it. To see why any one of the Utopias miscarries, is to see why Jefferson's hope came to nought. It matters little which experiment we select. One of the ablest and most practical business men in England, Robert Owen, started one in Indiana in 1826. The thirty thousand acres of land, the mills and houses, cost him \$150,000—a large fortune for those days. It excited much interest, and the Hall of Representatives in Washington was opened to him and crowded with distinguished hearers two long evenings, to hear the story of the "changed circumstances that should make for equality." Several men of note were among the members of this colony in Indiana: Vigo, the painter; Maclure, a rich geologist of note, attracted by the Pestalozzian system of education; and a well-known naturalist, Alexander le Seur. In 1824, all hopes were high.

The first signs of mutiny come with the endeavor to enforce the details of the equal life. If the members are to be sincere in discarding the tokens of artificial superiority, what better beginning than with personal dress? It was therefore decreed that the dress should be uniform. The men should be clothed in a jacket without marked color, the trousers attached to the jacket by buttons. It was early noted

that while many men submitted, they were not the most desirable members of the "Community of Equality." Many of the best male members openly sulked beneath this colorless jacket. As for the women, the disapproval was instant and unmistakable. They were to be garmented in an unadorned frock extending a little below the knee. The rest of the raiment was to consist of pantalets. The sulky protests of the men were very subdued compared to the unconcealed displeasure of the women. There could be no reasonable check on the expression of their vexation, because, in the final constitution, absolute freedom of speech was made not only a privilege but a duty. The women were quick to avail themselves of this fundamental right. They not only flatly refused to wear the vestments of equality, but formed, forthwith, a sort of sympathetic strike against any and all women members who dared to appear in them. To Mr. Owen this behavior seemed unworthy, but it caused him no misgivings. He said it was natural that people brought up in the long tradition of frivolous personal distinctions should be slow to free themselves from its influence. If the right beginning were made with the young, these foibles would pass away with other perversities of human nature.

The splendid optimism of Robert Owen was a part of his genius. The history of social reform has few names to which the future will give superior rank. I believe that the practical economic achievements of the English democracy owe more to him than to any other man. It is very plain, however, that many of his special methods of reaching equality were humorously ill chosen.

In all that Thomas Jefferson did in Virginia to abolish primogeniture, the entail of property, and to insure religious liberty, his contributions to equality were great. If he had done what he wished to do, establish popular education and abolish slavery, no name in our history would have been so illustrious, but the details of the *pêle-mêle* are of the same order as the colorless jacket and the pantalets. If there is a single lesson to be read from the long list of insolvent Utopias, it is that the thing we call human nature will not submit to have thrust upon it the externals of a literal equality.

The literary Utopias are unabashed by these perplexities. In Bellamy's world, each person has an extremely liberal credit card. This lordly provision is possible, because a fine imagination has spirited away a host of awkward difficulties. Wealth has been multiplied by the author at least a dozen times; the wealth enjoyed in common, indefinitely increased, and what is of greater importance than both of these items, the whole population has somehow become prudent and self-controlled and delicately considerate of others. If one does not exhaust his credit card, he cannot save for himself what remains. It passes to the common treasury, and he begins the new year with a new credit symbol.

Industrial changes that should give us, in the year 2000, ten or twelve times more wealth each year than we now have, are perhaps among the possibilities of the coming century. It would not be more startling than the changes that have become the commonplaces of the century just closing. A far tougher strain upon our credulity is the transforma-

tion in the race of men and women. The unfailing trait in every Utopia is this assumed change in race qualities. There is no difficulty that cannot be evaded, if one sets out with the right kind of humanity, or imagines one that has reached far higher development. Certainly the chief sources of our social troubles are old-fashioned ignorance and selfishness. If one choose to conceive a race that is without ignorance and without selfishness, the new society is at hand. Bellamy is not unaware of this fact, and therefore finds it necessary to introduce a religious revival—a revival such as the world has never seen for universality and thoroughness. Other worldly motives do not enter into it. A sublime enthusiasm for the good of all in this present world lifted the multitude into an ecstasy of well-doing. The revival did not cause the economic changes, but was rather caused by them. As we are told, it “made a short story of the later stages of the great upturning.” Many believed that the industrial revolution would require decades, but Dr. Leite says to Julian, while they wait for the play:—

“Those who held this opinion failed to take account of the popular enthusiasm which would certainly take possession of the movement and drive it irresistibly forward from the moment that the prospect of its success became fairly clear to the masses.” Giving the history of this enthusiasm, he further adds: “An impassioned eagerness seized upon the multitude to enter into the delectable land, so that they found every day’s, every hour’s delay intolerable. The young said, ‘Let us make haste, and go into the promised land while we are young, that we

may know what living is.' And the old said, 'Let us go in ere we die, that we may close our eyes in peace, knowing that it will be well with our children after us.' The leaders and pioneers of the Revolution, after having for so many years exhorted and appealed to a people for the most part indifferent or incredulous, now found themselves caught up and borne onward by a mighty wave of enthusiasm which it was impossible for them to check and difficult for them to guide, had not the way been so plain."

Then to cap the climax, as if the popular mind were not already in a sufficiently exalted frame, came the Great Revival, touching this enthusiasm with religious emotion. This quotation is not presented as a target for gibes, but to show the magician's skill in overcoming difficulties. The author knew that his scheme could not work, even in the imagination of the reader, unless the inexorable selfishness of man was dislodged. If equality were temporarily won, the old devil of self-seeking would destroy it again. The revival is made equal to the occasion. Even of the capitalists who fare ill in the book, it is said: "They were not persons of a more depraved disposition than other people, but merely like other classes, what the economic system had made them. Having like passions and sensibilities with other men, they were as incapable of standing out against the contagion of the enthusiasm of humanity, the passion of pity, and the compulsion of humane tenderness which the Great Revival had aroused, as any other class of people."

With an influence so irresistible at one's disposal, no millennium need be postponed. The communist

carries the division of property still further than the socialist; but if self-seeking is expunged, the extremer equality is as easy as the other. The philosophic anarchist has a splendid ideal; a society in which no prison, police, court, or law is necessary. If a revival or any other agency could make all people behave so well that no external constraint was necessary; if there were absolute generosity, forbearance, and good will, this ideal, too, could be realized. The Sphinx riddle is how to get such behavior. At present the Utopias monopolize it. The world, as known to us, is moved by other and far more complex motives.

To the cynical, the Utopias have ever been the easy mark of satire; and when they failed, the crushed hopes met from the outside only general hilarity and I-told-you-so complacency. The lack of sympathy with heroic and unselfish attempts to realize equality is itself evidence of the common dislike of equality. One of the later experiments, at Ruskin, Tennessee, for which great hopes had been felt, has met disaster. I have gathered many opinions from the press, but among them all no kindly note of appreciation. Has the world, at heart, a fixed, unconscious hatred of equality?

The history of these hardy enterprises is very chilling. For most it is a question of months, of years for a few. A small fraction is held in some permanence if only the binding power of religion is there. Religious sects can get little comfort from this, because it seems not to matter much what kind of religion holds them; that of the Mormon and the Shaker appear to be among the best for the purpose. If these communities are destitute of sturdy faith

or superstition, if you will, that subdues them into habits of obedience, they fall to pieces. They start radiant with high and noble purpose. In the beginning no sacrifice is wanting to realize the equal life. But a few moons come and go, and then a subtle poison begins its work.

Here again the explanation is seen in our most common observation of ourselves and of the men and women about us. A few years ago the American papers were very jocular at the expense of a rich American in London, because of his published claims to a distinguished family lineage. Yet that is what half one's acquaintances are everywhere doing to the extent of their ingenuity. Heraldry now is a charmed word for multitudes of very humble people. Librarians are suddenly plagued by the importunity for genealogical evidence of distinguished ancestry. Daughters of this and daughters of that; clubs, coteries, everywhere springing into life, bound to discover proof that they are not quite like other people. I saw a Colonial Dame flushed with delight because on a great occasion in another city her badge had given her showy precedence over certain Daughters of the Revolution, who at home never failed to let her feel her social inferiority. She said, "In all my life, no minute ever gave me a joy like that." The women need have no shame, they cannot outdo the men in this pursuit. Scarcely a town that is not gay with embellished orders stamped with every display of royal and knightly nomenclature. Read the list of officers from the Sublime Grand Master down, and ask what aristocracy in history ever went farther in its hunt for feathers. Two or three

years ago there was a gathering of three or four orders in Boston. From a single copy of the *Herald* I take the following modest titles, — Grand Dictator, Grand Chancellor, Supreme President, Grand Vice Dictator, Supreme Warden.¹ This outbreak is a droll commentary upon a society that has found so much to ridicule in the “haughty infirmities” of the old world. It has sprung, however, straight from human nature. We have won wealth and some leisure that have brought us into contact with foreign sources of distinction that we lack. No people ever displayed the passion for inequality more greedily than we. One builds a yacht, and if he can dine an English prince at the Cowes races, or entice the German Emperor on board at Kiel, this single breath of royal atmosphere at once endows the enterprising host with the rarest social privileges at home. Every circle breaks at the touch of the king’s hand.

This craving to index oneself off from others, by any mark that can be hit upon, is not very vicious, perhaps not always bad, but it is the essence of inequality and shows how rooted an instinct it is within us. I asked the head of a fashionable city school about the parents that brought their daughters to her. “It is,” she said, “so unusual as to surprise me when a parent shows any other real anxiety than to secure for her child certain social connections. Education has no meaning except as it furthers this end.” If this is snobbish, what is it for working girls’ clubs to exclude household domestics? I have known Boston shop-girls at their dances to put up a placard marked, “No servants admitted.” No

¹ *Sunday Herald*, October 7, 1900.

social group that can be named is free from this itching.

It is only when facts like these are faced without flinching or evasion, that the failure of most Utopian schemes is seen to be inevitable until far more radical work has been done upon race habits. It has often been said that these failures have been caused by unwillingness to work. The records give the lie to this explanation in scores of cases. The shirking of tasks is but a partial and secondary difficulty. Deeper than this, and far more uniform and permanent, is the depressing fact that the members do not continue to love each other. On the first high tide of generous ardor, they rejoice in each other's company at all hours. They are eager to sit at a common table, and to share the products of a common toil, but this love-feast rarely continues. The most saintly among them are often the least manageable of all. A single passage from a private letter of one who had seen much of this community life throws an almost pitiless light on the entire history: "We all liked each other at first, as brothers and sisters should. But a very devil of ill will and suspicion began to show itself in the second month between Brother H. and Brother F. It began in a way so contemptible that I am ashamed to tell it. Brother H. had an ailing stomach and could not eat a certain sweet pudding served once a week. Brother F.'s great fondness for this dish so worked upon the feelings of Brother H. that he could not refrain from un-Christian remarks to those about him." This narrative continues in the same rare vein, but it needs no further quoting. Though only a sweet pudding, it

resulted in the sourest ferment for several others to whom it gave opportunity to vent their own ill humors. The incident is less frivolous than it appears, for it was merely an occasion to express feelings that in default of pudding would have seized upon the soup or the cut of the beard. Sometimes it is the manner of eating, sometimes it is too much or too loud talking, sometimes too little. Silence irritates as well as garrulity. Gossip, jokes ill-timed, low vitality in one, and buoyant health in another, humor here and lack of it there, romantic fervor in this member, and in another only gray matter of fact.

The result is the more easily understood because the personnel of these communities is naturally composed of those who had already become extremely critical of the old society which they found so faulty. They bring to the new society the same qualities that could not tolerate former associations. In the letter quoted, it is said, "We expected to attract queer people, but that there were so many kinds of queerness and that they could be so unreasonable, we had to learn by most disheartening experience."

These are but the oldest platitudes of race experience. The members of these Utopias were thrown too closely and too constantly together. If people like each other, they also dislike each other; if they are held together by attractions, they are also driven apart by repulsions, and space must be given for the selective process of both impulses—for antipathies as well as for affections. Unless the Buddhist and Catholic monasteries are thought to be satisfactory ideals of the equal life, there is no sign in the history of more than four hundred experiments, that a vigor-

ous humanity will long resign itself to any separate colony scheme that the wit of the reformer has thus far devised. People are driven together under conditions so narrow, with so much sameness, that the limits become unbearable after the first enthusiasm subsides. The test which every colony must meet, that sets itself apart from the great world, is to make the conditions of the community life so rich in variety, that the various temperaments can find room for activity. Not to do this, is soon to let loose every imp of petty jealousy and bickering that possesses the human creature. The commonest lessons from every almshouse and old ladies' home should have taught us this. That which now keeps these defects somewhat in abeyance is that competitive society, bad as it is, gives man leeway for his energy. The stronger the personality, the more room and variety is needed for self-expression. No one can look upon the Shakers without feeling that their community has merely selected from the outside millions a certain type of man and woman, kindly and docile, but for the most part destitute of virility. Men and women rich in strong personal character cannot be so cabined.

I have heard a kindly and intelligent sea captain, half his life spent in long voyages, say that the severest test to morals that he ever faced was with his own crew and passengers after two months at sea. "We became touchy, sour, and disagreeable for the most ridiculous reasons. I have been surly the entire day, because the mate said good morning, and surly another day, because he did not. On a four months' voyage, I have seen passengers act for days as if they loathed each other. When we had

escaped from the ship, and had been two days on land, we treated each other like human beings.”

The saintly F. D. Maurice, riding in a London omnibus, over the jolting pavement, imagines the effect of smooth pavements (just being introduced) upon the friendly good-nature of the passengers. When the rattling ceases, Maurice fancies that strangers will catch eagerly at the opportunity of holding sweet converse with each other. The pavement has come, and one may ride a hundred miles upon it without observing the slightest general tendency to embrace the chance of neighborly intercourse.

When the passengers rush to fill our railway trains, do they try to get together? Unless with a friend or with one of their family, they apparently desire nothing so much as to keep apart in a separate seat, or in two seats if they can monopolize them. There is not the least eagerness to entice strangers to occupy the place beside them. The apart-instinct is as powerful as the together-instinct, and it does not become less so as society develops. The proprietor of one of the older Boston hotels told me that when he worked in a hotel for his father, a generation ago, men who had never seen each other made no objection to taking the same bed, or sleeping three beds in a room. “Now,” he added, “half my customers would leave for another hotel, rather than submit to have their bed in the same room with another. Everybody wants to keep as far away from others as he can get.” This does not mean that there is less good will among men than in more promiscuous times. The gay knights and ladies of the Rhine castles who ate with their fingers out of the same dish

and knew no napkins, were not more unselfish than the modern, who insists upon a separate plate. Separateness and apartness increase with every step in the social growth. Upon one side common functions, common wealth, common privileges, are enlarged. Parks, libraries, museums, vast educational facilities, are everywhere increasing at the same time that purely individual functions increase. The together-instincts do not develop more rapidly than the apart-instincts. No social scheme that fails to reckon with the ever widening variety of race energies has a moment's chance of success. The literary Utopias often avoid these stubborn realities by first destroying society in order to have the ground cleared for their own building, or they begin on an island or in some realm of nowhere, unplagued by complicated traditions.

Bellamy is unusual in this, that he pluckily takes up society as it is. Syndicates, trusts, department stores, furnish him with his best material. Develop them far enough and universally enough and petty individual enterprises will be wiped out, or gathered into these colossal undertakings that only the state can manage. But Bellamy's own material is dangerous in his hands, for the reason that it hardens in spite of him into a huge mechanism that fills many of his own persuasion with repugnance. The most picturesque incident, as well as one of the most significant, in modern socialistic thought, occurs for our instruction almost as soon as Bellamy's dream was fairly before the world. It came from a brother socialist, but one of far richer and more varied power than Bellamy possessed, the English poet and artist, William Morris. He, too, has the divine rage against the

competitive system. He, too, will destroy it, root and branch, but he is first of all poet and artist craftsman, vitalizing every hour with more intense and diverse life energy than any one of the famed group of which he was a part. Morris catches greedily at "Looking Backward," reads and rereads it, but is choked in its atmosphere. If one who called Bellamy comrade, who called himself a socialist, feels such acute aversion, as if cramped and stifled when he has to inhabit Bellamy's social fabric merely in imagination, what would happen to a nation with pulsing activity an hundred-fold more multiform than in any single individual, however gifted? ¹

It would be without excuse to linger at such length over the Utopias if they did not present both a theory and a practice of equality. In their literary form, as in their varied experimenting, they furnish inestimable material for judgment. They show us what men and women think about a certain kind of equality before they try it, and what they think after the trial is made. These experiments have gone on through many centuries and among many nationalities. They have taken widely different forms. At least twenty are struggling at the present time with the same hopes and the same embarrassments. I have seen the records of fourteen attempts made in Australian colonies. The three or four that now seem least likely to fail are so greatly modified by securing private property rights that they appear to set slight value on equality in its Utopian sense. The literal interpretation of equality has no logical completeness except in communism. Communism captivates at

¹ Both Bebel and Kautsky had the same feeling as Morris.

the same time the saint and the loafer. It offers to the imagination what the heroic are glad to give, and to the dead-beat what he is greedy to take.

As the socialist dialectic will always embarrass the advocate of the single tax, so the logic of the communist will harass the socialist, because he leaves certain forms of property still in private possession. To the communist, one form is as nefarious as another. I knew an apostle of unflinching equality, a French *égalitaire*, who was dedicated absolutely to his principles. The coat on his back, his writing-desk and books, the wife with whom he lived, belonged, he claimed, as strictly to another as to himself. "The principle," he added, "loses its greatness and its power over men if it is not harmonious and complete." The socialists, more than all others, roused his wrath, "because they pick and choose," he said, "like the stupid bourgeois, this or that fragment of equality, according to their taste."

In the extraordinary success of the great foundry (*familistère*) at Guise, in North France, Godin carried equality to the farthest limits consistent with the management of a great and paying business. His youth was fired with communistic ideals. Though rich, he lived in the same building with his workmen; but in their common theatre his family seat was somewhat apart and better than the others. In showing me this a workman said, "Godin was true to the great principle up to a certain point, but we never liked it that he did not watch the play from the same seat as the rest of us." This workman was in the theoretic stage. Godin was sorely plagued by the importunity of this type of workman, as those who have to apply theory

will always be worried by the unhampered critic. This is the chastening ordeal which socialism must undergo in the coming century, as it tries to bring us nearer the "reign of equal rights."

II

Realities

It was my endeavor in the last chapter to state fully and fairly the ineffaceable limits which experience has already drawn about the pettier conceptions of equality. The origin of many of the most startling inequalities is biological. To get born with certain qualities is to have many chances to one against the man who came into life without them. We all see that the sources of superiority are in the gifts that cannot be made equal. The mysteries of temperament, buoyancy, vivid imagination, prudence, charms of personality, tact, inflexible purpose, steadiness of self-control, and even physical gifts, like good digestion and ability to sleep, are qualities that lead men beyond the average of their fellows. To put the least check upon these distinctions (or inequalities) would bring a common and a grievous loss.

We have thus far neither the wisdom nor the moral courage to raise the questions on which these congenital superiorities depend. For a very indefinite future these deep sources of inequality will remain practically beyond our influence. These are difficulties, however, that in no way conflict with a larger and truer interpretation of equality. Because absurd claims to literal equality have been made, we need not spoil the discussion by continuing to repeat them.

Helvetius is still quoted as maintaining that one man's gifts (all privileges removed) are equal to another's. This is now known to be so wide of the truth that it is a poor shift for an opponent of equality to make much of such exaggerations, and thus divert attention from claims that may be rational.

The abler socialist writers — the Webbs, Vanderwilde, Kautsky, Malon — know the limitations of equality indicated in the last chapter quite as well as smart casuists like Mr. Mallock. They do not now ask for fantastic identities of gift or possession. They ask for a social and economic reconstruction that shall give new freedom for race development.

Our real problem, therefore, is to know how far opportunity to develop every gift is open to all; how far do artificial privileges restrict these opportunities to the few; how far does an imperfect social and industrial system handicap a portion of the people; above all, how does an unregulated competition select, stimulate, and strengthen individual qualities and social ideals that thwart a genuine equality?

When Mr. Webb says, "We want to bring about the condition in which every member of society shall have a fair chance to use and to develop the gifts with which he happens to be born," he is not putting in claim to an absurdity. When he asks for a democracy so broadly educated that it appreciates competence and its relation to the infinitely varied tasks of society, he only asks for what that very prince of democrats, Jefferson, called the "natural aristocracy." In writing to Adams (October 28, 1813), he says, "May we not even say that that form of government

is best which provides the most effectually for a pure selection of these *aristoi* into the offices of government?"

If the purpose is to try merely to see what heart truth there is in this dream, we shall admit that all external signs of equality, like dress, apartments, working hours, are not of primary, not even of secondary, importance. Indeed, as the discussion has developed, less and less stress is laid upon them, and that which has taken their place is indicated by vague commonplace phrases such as "equality of opportunity." It has no ultimate purpose that all receive the same material gifts. These, equal or unequal, exist for an end beyond themselves; that end is the largest, freest, and richest life of which the individual is capable. But who would claim that equal material gifts are necessary to this ideal? If the goal is a society in which all can live out openly and healthfully every faculty they possess, then "equality of chance" is as good a phrase as any to express the conditions that would make such life possible. Both of these phrases have become wearisome. Yet it seems impossible to fix upon better ones, if the purpose is to show what the ideal of equality must be.

For a great multitude in our midst, equality of chance is choked by all manner of obstacles. Here is the test to our honesty in the discussion. On the one side it is maintained that the average man always has his equal chance; upon the other, this is madly denied. To get at such truth as there is between these extremes of opinion is to see all that the problem can give.

Let us state again what is deepest in this unabating purpose of the demos. It is not for absolute or external equalities. It is not for any equality that will submit to nice measurement. It is for far *more* equality than exists. It is for as much equality as each is capable of seizing and using to his own and others' good. All will admit that justice halts until men and women in general do have essential equality in using their powers.

The Utopian stage has made it plain that external uniformities in every kind and degree are discredited. These are but the poor letter of social justice. Its spirit will not be without external tokens, but these will be lightly regarded. The spirit of equality will appeal to another order of evidence. It will claim as the imperishable right of every child born among us to have, as far as possible, the full and free occasions to live its best life. A society which should give this chance to all, would make the nearest approach to justice. In the light of this conception, we should straightway test our evils and our remedies. In its light we should ask what is now being done to bring these fairer results a little nearer. In its light we should seek to know what class now has this opportunity to make the most of life, and through what agencies so great a good has been attained. In its light we should inquire what class is hindered and why it is hindered from putting life to its best uses. Unerringly one can point to large sections of the toiling world whose first steps toward an ampler life are hopelessly barred.

Let us test this by the very simplest illustrations,

which show us a very fountain-head of quite unnecessary inequalities.

It is not yet twenty years since a careful investigation in Berlin showed that more than seventy thousand of her population were living in single rooms. It was found that the death-rate for this group rose to the appalling figure of 163.5 per thousand in the year. On the other hand, when families had three or four rooms, the death-rate fell below 20 in the thousand. This would excite only incredulity if we had not the same history in English and Scotch cities less than a generation ago. But the sociological significance of this ghastly difference is not in the mere fact of such a death record; it is as nothing compared with what that mortality implies. Colonel Waring believed that every one of these abnormal deaths stood for more than ten times as many serious and corrupting illnesses. A death-rate so unnatural implies degeneracy in the entire group. A mortality rate of 18 per thousand may mean a healthy community, but a community devastated to the extent of 163.5 per thousand is not only itself diseased, but a source of general social disorder, intemperance, crime, prostitution, and special forms of lawlessness.¹

Another illustration that finds its counterpart in every community shows how the first essentials of

¹ Professor Marshall says,* "The extent of the infant mortality that arises from preventable causes may be inferred from the fact that while the annual death-rate of children under five years of age is only about two per cent in the families of peers, and is less than three per cent for the whole of the upper classes, it is between six and seven per cent for the whole of England. †

* "Principles of Economics," first edition, p. 257.

† The terrible effects upon the family when crowded into small space may be seen in the first chapter of Graham Wallace's "Life of Francis Place."

equality are snatched from the weak, under our very eyes. It was noted at the Cambridge Associated Charities that a succession of destitute "cases" were traceable to a crushing indebtedness, under which the victim was staggering. An investigation begun in January, 1896, showed that in a few months over seven hundred loans had been placed among the poor, at rates of interest varying from 50 per cent to 120 per cent. The existing law was easily evaded by frequent transfers of the mortgage, the victim paying from \$3 to \$5 for every transfer. Of over one hundred cases carefully traced, a few examples will lay bare the enormity of the wrong: (1) "Twenty dollars were borrowed, from which \$5 were at once deducted for 'expenses'; interest charged \$1.50 a month (*i.e.* 90 per cent on \$20) or 120 per cent on the \$15 actually received. Paid \$73.50 in interest, after which mortgage was foreclosed, and furniture costing \$150 was seized and sold, the family being left Saturday night with nothing but a stove and rug." (2) "Thirty-two dollars borrowed. Interest \$2.50 a month. When the case was taken in hand at the office, \$54.25 had already been paid to the lender, who was still demanding \$18.50." (3) "Thirty dollars borrowed. Interest \$2 per month. This had dragged on until the wretched debtor had paid \$106, with \$29 more to pay."

Who can assert that these people had equality of opportunity, or that the heavy burden of their unequal struggle was a decree of fate?

These cases are very bad, but they are not the most extreme ones. If Cambridge is exceptional, it is in being freer from cruelties like these than the

average large town. The great city offers a spectacle of helpless entanglements of which the illustrations give but the slightest hint. Do these snared thousands have equality of opportunity? The first step toward it is barred from them by their ignorance, their poverty, and the habits which these have bred. The instance is the fitter for our use, because, like so many sources of social inequality, it is for the most part unnecessary. It is among the most hopeful of sociological discoveries that the larger part of these crippling conditions that make for inequality, is merely a social blunder. The child in industry, the truck store, a large part of the system of fining and "over-time," the sweatshop, the tenement-house evil, are one and all departures from the highest business standard. An honored Boston physician said at a gathering interested in day nurseries: "We used to think that almost any treatment was good enough for the babies of the poor. We know now that the best which science affords is even the *cheapest* for society." The vast material gathered in Germany, under the Sickness and Accident Insurance, proves that in final cash reckoning it pays to have the best appliances for the sick and the injured, the best medicines, the best physicians, and the best nursing. It is found that no extravagance is so wasteful as a skinflint economy. As a result of this splendid information, the whole standard of ministering to misfortune among the poor is being raised throughout the entire empire. The head of a great business in Elgin, Illinois, told me, "I have learned that almost all over-time work is bad management; all work beyond nine hours — before long we shall say eight — is a mistaken policy."

Among these evils from which inequalities spring, some can be stopped altogether, and all can be diminished. The lending of money at seven or eight times the current rates cannot be totally extinguished. There is no way given to men of protecting all degrees of carelessness and ignorance from the consequences of their folly. No more evidence is wanting, however, to show that loan associations and municipal pawnshops may meet these needs among the poor, at less than a third of the average pawnshop burden, and with far greater safety and consideration for the borrower. The way has been made clear for an immense decrease in this special source of unequal opportunities.

What shall be said of equal opportunity for boys who begin their careers as described by the ablest factory inspector that Illinois ever had? "In many factories it is customary for the youngest lad to go to the nearest saloon, carrying a long pole with pegs in its side, and a tin can hanging from every peg. On the return trip the pole lies across the lad's shoulder, and the cans containing beer swing as he walks. He is paid for his trouble in sips of beer. The 'beer boy' is a part of the equipment in all large smithies, and, indeed, wherever work is done at an excessive temperature. The workmen, full-grown and able-bodied, and engaged at steady work, take their beer as food or refreshment. But they have no realizing sense of the effect on the little lad's growing body and mind of the sips which they give him.

"A far larger number of children form the habit of drinking from exhaustion. They work out of all proportion to their strength, endure the same extremes

of heat, cold, noise, dirt, discomfort, and exhaustion as the men among whom they work, and feel the need of something — they do not know what. The most accessible and instantaneous means of comfort is a drink, and the habit is easily and quickly formed. Even where boys are restrained from drinking by the fortunate habit of carrying home all their earnings, a practice widespread and beneficent, the exhaustion of the long working-day, heavy and indigestible lunch, and long journey to and from work, in all weathers, ultimately bring a craving for stimulants. And when a raise in wages comes, when the lad is fifteen or sixteen, it often happens that the old wage is carried home and the difference spent in drink. The example of the older men counts for much in this, but physical exhaustion counts for more."

I have already referred to thirty thousand homes, at least, in and about New York City alone, in which the sweated work of the clothing trade is done. The Tenement-house Commission, with the help of the most competent physicians in New York, has passed judgment on this type of home.

Dr. John H. Pryor said (November 16, 1900): "So far as I can learn there are in the tenement houses of New York City alone — not in Greater New York, but in New York City alone — there are constantly 20,000 consumptives; that is, considering all the stages of the disease. Nor does this show the prevalence of the disease in the tenement houses; because it is found by post-mortem examination of those dying from other diseases that very many of them have forms of tuberculosis also. So that I think the statement is perfectly safe that a majority

of the tenement-house dwellers in New York City have tuberculosis in some form. It is a disease quite distinctive of tenement-house life at the present time."

This is the situation which the consumer of these goods has to face. The Consumers' League long hesitated to lay great stress upon these aspects of filth and disease, because of their alarmist and sensational nature. The sober and authoritative testimony, before such a body as the Tenement-house Commission, of physicians and trained nurses of the highest standing makes it impossible for the League to withhold this evidence from the public. The menace to the great multitude of innocent buyers is so immediate and so grave that agitation should not rest until every buyer can have at the retail store an absolute guarantee that the purchased garment is not from a sweatshop or a tenement, but is made under conditions so open to proper inspection as to insure to the worker a tolerable existence, and to the home where the garments are worn immunity from disease.

Here is a kind of cheapness that means an early and decrepit age, an unfit parenthood with offspring that are to be mere vehicles of that stunted and wretched lineage which is the shame and peril of our common life. If the sweatshop spread diphtheria and typhus, there is the hue and cry before personal danger. But these diseases are the very slightest elements of the real risk to the general good. It is the spoiled human life with its deadly legacy of enfeebled mind and body that reacts directly and indirectly on the social whole.

Look again at the problem of child labor which the new economic conditions of the South have rapidly developed.

A perfectly competent committee has published a report upon this subject from which I quote a single page :—

“From 1870 to 1880, of those employed in the cotton factories, the number of men over sixteen years of age increased 92.8 per cent, the women over sixteen years of age increased 77 per cent, and the children under sixteen years of age increased 140.9 per cent.

“From 1880 to 1890 the number of men over sixteen years of age increased 21.8 per cent, the women over sixteen years of age increased 269 per cent, and the children under sixteen years of age increased 106.5 per cent.

“From 1890 to 1900 the number of men over sixteen years of age increased 79 per cent, the women over sixteen years of age 158.3 per cent, and the children under sixteen years of age increased 270.7 per cent !

“According to the official report for 1899 from the Labor Bureau of North Carolina, the state, represented by Colonel D. A. Tompkins, and the only state of the South presenting an official report upon labor statistics, less than 10 per cent of the operatives in the textile mills of that state were under fourteen years of age. But, according to the report of 1901, those under fourteen constituted nearly 18 per cent of the whole number. Of the total of 45,044 textile operatives, 7996 (shall we say 8000?) are under fourteen years, and the average wage of the child has decreased from 32 cents to 29 cents per day. (See page 212 of the North Carolina Report of Department of Labor and Printing for 1899, and page 187 of Report

of same department for 1901.) The daily wage of the factory children of the South is often as low as 15 cents; it is sometimes as low as 9 cents. The North Carolina figures also indicate that there, as elsewhere throughout the South, the number of little girls among the employees far exceeds the number of boys."¹

I have heard some disputing about the literal accuracy of some of these figures. It is claimed both that they are overstated and that they are understated. But no greater exactness of statement will modify the ugly meaning of the page. One has here, besides the manufacture of cotton, the manufacture of future inequalities on an immense scale—in ten years an increase of children in these factories, 270.7 per cent!

More than twenty thousand children are at work in these mills at the present moment. It is the opinion of some Southern investigators that one-third of these are under ten years of age. This means a heavy legacy of future inequalities. It is of course natural that from the poorer farming districts, families should flock to the factories for the higher wage that the entire family can earn. With no legislative protection, the deadliest form of the "family wage" is substituted for the wage of the natural breadwinner. If he have dead-beat instincts, he can lounge

¹ "The Case against Child Labor," an argument by Edgar Gardner Murphy of Montgomery, chairman of the executive committee on Child Labor in Alabama. The other members of the committee are Ex-Governor Thomas G. Jones, Judge J. B. Gaston, and Gordon Macdonald of Montgomery; John Craft of Mobile; A. J. Reilly of Birmingham, and Dr. J. H. Phillips, superintendent of schools of Birmingham.

at the saloon upon the money which his wife and children earn. One finds them in every Southern mill-town. It is under these conditions that every variety of a vicious truck system of wage payment springs into existence. One wanders about in some of these communities in a kind of dream, as if he had been spirited back into an English factory town of two generations ago.

A common argument to justify this great wrong is that as England had to pass through this stage so must the South pass through it. This is an excuse, it is not an argument. The very meaning of social politics is that it gathers experience for practical use in just such issues as child labor. There is no need that we should pass through all the desolating stages of that former experience. In the England of 1825 there was no precedent. Aside from the splendid achievements of the English acts and preventive legislation coupled with popular education, our own states, like Connecticut, Minnesota, and Massachusetts, have legal limitation as to age and compulsory school attendance which check these evils at their source. A competitor of Robert Owen, who pronounced legal interference with child labor the "maudlin sentimentalism of those who knew neither business nor human nature," had been making in the cotton business, according to his own admission, two hundred per cent in yearly profits. Yet he and his fellows held that they could not afford to dispense with child labor because that would drive business out of England. The Southern mills do not make such profits, but some of them make thirty per cent, and use the same argument that they cannot

afford to do away with the child's help, because of Northern competition. Northern capitalists have more humiliation in this wickedness than Southern, because the main issue has been long under discussion in the North.¹ Compulsory school attendance during the period in which employment is prohibited is now required in seven states. In every instance where this has been enforced, as in Massachusetts, there has been no difficulty in keeping children out of industries.

In Pennsylvania, in an atmosphere thick with black dust and vibrating with the roar of the crushers, one may see an army of breaker boys sorting the coal and picking slate. Hundreds of these children cannot be above ten and eleven years of age. The parents sanction a lying certificate of age, and the employers are indifferent. After three or four years at the breaker, they pass to the mine proper. Equality of opportunity in no conceivable sense belongs to these boys. If they had been born crippled or stupid, that inequality would be out of our control, but much of the handicap under which they now struggle can be removed. Three or four years of school at this age multiplies life's chances for every one of these youths.

Especial emphasis is here given to those instances that have to do with the child defrauded of its educational rights, because education in its best and largest sense carries the deepest hope of all ultimate attainable equalities. Careful training for one's

¹ The absurd differences in the standard of industrial regulation in our various states has this advantage for the student, that it enables him to bring into vivid comparison a score of conflicting policies.

tasks is two or three times more necessary than it was in times that old men still remember. Exceptional force will overcome these barriers with little or no schooling, but commonplace and average capacity, that has to-day scant and slovenly training, is disadvantaged as never before in history.

If we bring the least disposition toward fair interpretation, we may now see what the best spokesmen in the labor and socialist movement ask. As they frankly recognize the final passing away of the Utopian stage, as they recognize the uselessness of isolated colony schemes, their conception of social equality is no longer a visionary freak, but has as much soberness as most of our saner social ideals.

The "passion of the democracy" has the perfectly rational aim that is expressed in the term "multiply life's chances." It is a quantitative expression. No influence that society has at command could give complete equality to these breaker boys or to the child victims in Southern mills. Yet we can give a great deal *more* equality. If the reader wonders why so poor a platitude requires statement, the answer is that these simple facts are necessary to show that the best of our socialist critics are asking merely for these further steps toward the more equal life. They are asking for what all fair men admit to be a just and rational aim in social bettering.¹

¹ The question of equality could of course have no complete discussion without including the first practical purpose of a militant collectivism, — to socialize the means of production and to use the resources of a fairer system of taxation to strike at the present roots of economic privilege. These sources of inequality are, however, a part of the discussion in the entire volume.