

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### SLOW MOVEMENT OF GREAT REFORMS.

No one visited the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo without picking up new ideas or saw ways of improving on old ones. The workingman who walked through the machinery, liberal arts or electricity building, for example, was a poor stick indeed if he did not go away better prepared to give satisfaction to his employers, and be of more value to himself and the community in which he lived. That such an assembling of the latest achievements in the arts and sciences must necessarily aid the inventive mind is beyond question.

For myself I was particularly interested in the crowds. And to see these it was not necessary to visit the Midway, though doubtless few people went to the exposition without taking a stroll, at least, through this fascinating highway of all nations. Each building, and department in a measure, had its type of crowd. In those devoted to manufactures and the liberal arts the women were in the majority. In the machinery building the men predominated—in the main thoughtful men who came with a purpose. The art building attracted a still different class, and it was not at all difficult to note a facial resemblance running through a considerable number.

Having been on the grounds during the illness and death of President McKinley, when the eyes of the whole nation, it is supposed, were directed towards Buffalo, and hoping for the good news that would tell of his recovery from the assassin's bullet, I had a favorable opportunity to see just how much the crowds really were interested in the outcome of the fatal

shooting, and to hear the expressions of opinion on socialism, anarchy and reform movements generally. When home with those we know, we are not apt to pay much attention to chance expressions. They are so multitudinous that their value is depreciated, but to talk with a stranger on a burning question, when he feels certain that the airing of his opinions cannot affect his business or his social, religious or political welfare, is a different thing. So I made it a point, while on the grounds, and opportunity offered, to drop a word or two with an interrogation point attached, just to see how the land lay in the minds of the average citizen away from home.

The result showed that even the mildest of socialism, let alone the more drastic sort, will have hard sledding for many years to gain even a respectable foothold. And as for anarchy, not one in a thousand, it might be said, has conceived of any but the violent kind—if such can be called anarchy at all. The seeds that are to bring forth the cooperative commonwealth and revolutionize industry have not yet sprouted. The commercial interests of the country must yet go through many financial panics and take all sorts of remedies for industrial ills before the common people will listen to the voice of the socialist philosopher demanding the dethronement of the present captains of industry.

Those who are being pinched by the trusts—individual manufacturers and small corporations in the main, who are not able to compete with immense concerns with unlimited capital and the ability to buy up the latest inventions—may make a great noise, but it is really having little effect on the public. The people have seen the rise of corporations, and the elimination of the individual manufacturer, with no harsh result to their interests, and they reason that a little larger concern will bring advantages not to be had with the smaller ones. The millionaire is here to stay, and he is doing good, they reason, with his millions. At any

rate wealth is a blessed thing, and few of them will refuse the opportunity of becoming millionaires themselves by following the highway traveled by trusts.

So it is just as safe, as it ever was, so far as this generation is concerned, to buy real estate as an investment. Taxes are not going to be shifted on land values—where, however, they really belong—just yet. The manufacturer with new ideas in his lines of business, capital to back them and perseverance to crown them with success, can proceed to carry out his plans, with the knowledge that the government isn't going to step in and run his business for him this decade. There is going to be neither buying out nor confiscation during the first quarter of the twentieth century at least, even if during the next three-quarters.

As to the public ownership of public utilities, the talk was different. All approached on the subject believed in it, though most of those with any ideas at all had not worked the matter out sufficiently far to know how it could be brought about without injuring someone in his "property" rights. That was the poser. Let someone come forward with a clear-cut scheme for the public ownership of the railroads of the country that will do no violence to the popular idea of property rights, and this phase of the industrial problem will be settled instantaneously. The government will own and run every railroad in the country.

In the fall of 1901 certain great railroad interests clashed. Two powerful syndicates were determined to "run their business" in their own way, and to allow of no interference with their chosen territory. The battle royal led to the formation of a third corporation for operating both lines of railroad transportation, with one interest in control; so it practically resolves itself into the ownership of the lines by one man. Whether that man is Hill, Morgan, Vanderbilt, Gould, or Rockefeller makes little difference. Some day it is going to be an easy thing to take collective control, through legislative enactments, when only

one man stands between the private ownership of the country's railroads and the best interests of the whole people.

This is a phase of cooperation—or socialism—in which even manufacturers and employes generally can take an interest. It will eliminate from the field of competition the question of preferred rates that certain combinations are supposed to enjoy, and will leave every industry on its own bottom, able to dominate its own natural territory. Yet even this relief is some distance in the future. The masses are as a rule very conservative, and the fear that the national ownership of the railroads will lead to further reforms based on socialism, will deter many from advocating it even though they acknowledge it would be a good thing. Still this reform is surely coming. It looks at present as if it would be the first one of any importance to become an accomplished fact, yet there is always the possibility that something else, not now in the public mind at all, will press it aside and demand and receive recognition first. Such things occasionally do happen when industrial stress suddenly becomes so acute as to seem unbearable.

The world, on the whole, is going to wag for a good many years much as it is wagging today. There is an heredity in business as in other things, and environments must be very much altered before there can be any great or startling change. When all eyes are looking at an evil it is certain that someone will discover a remedy. And though he may not be the person to apply the medicine, there will arise in the fullness of time the physician who can. When that day comes, whatever is good in socialism and anarchy and all the other isms, will be absorbed, and the civilized world will rush forward to a greater degree of material prosperity coupled with a larger share for the masses of the wealth by them created.

The fact that reforms move slowly is no reason why anyone's efforts should cease in the direction of

improving social and industrial conditions. Progress though its advance is only by inches, is still progress, and duty is duty, whether it be well or ill paid. To those imbued with the proper spirit there is more real pleasure in helping along the reform forces of the world to the accomplishment of good, than in being the beneficiary of a victory on some gory field that receives the plaudits of unthinking "patriots," who, reveling in conquests of might, show that their civilization is only skin deep, and that under the garb of a follower of the Master there is hidden the spirit of a savage. Lust for blood is one of the strong proofs of the theory of evolution.

Not every reform, however, is in the dim and misty future. Palliatives can and should be pushed to victory, and this is possible without holding back weightier matters. Indeed many minor reforms, when accomplished, will give clearer perspectives of fundamentals, and for this, if for no other reason, are not to be neglected.

Bugle calls to duty are today echoing around the world. From the counter of the merchant, from the bench of the mechanic, from the library of the student, from the ranks of the day laborer, there is everywhere gathering under one banner an army of earnest men and women, who, in the fullness of time, will march forth to the conquest of all social injustices and economic maladjustments. And though many seemingly insurmountable obstacles apparently bar the way, yet it will be found that not a few, when vigorously attacked, are only the shadows of our own fears. Right and justice must eventually triumph.

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#### DOLLARS OR MEN.

A system of laws which protects dollars in preference to protecting human beings is not the one which will bring the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest number.—*Harriet E. Orcutt, author of "Can Poverty Be Abolished?"*