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*Title:* Our Heritage of Liberty: Its Origin, Its Achievement, Its Crisis. A Book for War Time.

*Author:* Leacock, Stephen Butler (1869-1944)

*Date of first publication:* 1942

*Edition used as base for this ebook:* London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1942

*Date first posted:* 5 October 2010

*Date last updated:* October 17, 2014

Faded Page ebook#201410A3

This ebook was produced by: Al Haines

**Stephen Leacock**

# **OUR HERITAGE OF LIBERTY**

*Its Origin, Its Achievement, Its Crisis*

**A BOOK FOR WAR TIME**

**LONDON  
John Lane The Bodley Head**

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MORRISON AND GIBB LTD., LONDON AND EDINBURGH  
for JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LIMITED  
8 Bury Place London W.C. 1



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## BRITAIN AND AMERICA

Liberty is fighting for its life. In the present struggle the whole effort of Britain and America is the preservation of the liberty of free men, under the democratic government of free nations. The whole war effort directed against us aims to impose autocracy and to enforce submission. As between these two things there can be no choice and no compromise. One must go under. If we believe that right beats wrong, we cannot doubt which will survive. But in the hour of trial it is necessary to renew our faith.

Of late years, both in Britain and America, we had come to value our liberty too little. We were forgetting the long struggle through which it had come to us, and the price paid. We had begun to take too much for granted. In England Mr John Bull, grown a little heavy and inactive, still kept repeating, "An Englishman's house is his castle." When people interrupted him and protested, "But, Mr Bull, this man hasn't any house," he would answer testily, "Quite so, quite so, we are taking that up in Parliament—in fact in a week or two it will go into committee and after that it will go..." and then he paused for he knew very well where it would go.

So, too, with John Bull's relative, Uncle Sam, over in America. He kept on saying, "Yes, sir, the price of liberty is eternal vigilance." Then he yawned and took a look around and didn't feel so sure about the vigilance. What were these slums, these millions of workers without work, these share-croppers, these miners' cabins, these dust-blown farms? "I must look into it," he said, "after the baseball season, right after it, or after I get back from Miami!"

Yet in spite of this lapse towards forgetfulness, till just a short time ago this almost world-wide freedom seemed to be a permanent achievement and advance of humanity. Then came the war. The shadow of force and tyranny has fallen over a great part of Europe. Liberty is here derided, there trampled under foot, and everywhere in danger. Human kindness is replaced by cruelties unknown for centuries.

It is proper therefore for us to look back, for renewed inspiration and sustained courage, over the ground that has been traversed. We need to read again the story of the long struggle by which liberty seemed achieved. We need to examine again the ideals and the principles on which free government was established in Britain and America. We need perhaps to ask what were the shortcomings, how much there was still incomplete and unaccomplished, to what extent our freedom, while established in the letter, nevertheless failed in the spirit. It is the purpose of this survey to undertake such an inquiry.

About a hundred years ago people in Great Britain and America, and indeed people in most of Europe, lived in what was in one sense a singularly happy world. It was not so much happy in what it had, as in its expectation of what it was about to get. Poverty there was, indeed, and social misery, such as the world never saw again till yesterday. But with it all it was, for those who viewed it in its wider aspect, an age of hope. Happiness seemed within reach, a new world within sight.

This was because there had come into the world, and spread from mind to mind, from nation to nation, the new ideal of individual liberty as the key to human happiness. After 1815, with the end of the twenty-three years of the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, there began what was presently called the Great Peace. The younger generation, people under thirty, could scarcely remember what peace was like. Yet this peace, apart from minor and brief conflicts, was to last in Europe till only the older people could remember war. A contemporary historian,<sup>[1]</sup> with no vision of the grim future gathering over Europe, could speak of the era as "a commencement of unexampled peace and prosperity, as well as of rapid and manifest political, intellectual, moral and religious progress."

This Great Peace, indeed, seemed different from any that had come before. People felt that it was going to last for ever, because it was based upon a new idea that seemed to make all nations one, all interests the same. The new ideal of individual liberty that had spread abroad even in war itself, as fire burns under grass, seemed to guarantee to every man the right to govern himself, to be happy in his own way, to work out his own salvation. So the doctrine had spread abroad in Europe and, above all, had been reflected back from America, as the doctrine of Christianity had spread over Europe in the dark hours of barbarian conquest after Rome fell. Thus does light expel darkness; so will it again.

Nor was the new outlook all based on theory. It seemed to have a solid foundation also on facts. For this was a changing world into which had come machinery to revolutionize industry and science, to point the way to marvels almost beyond belief. No wonder then in such a world the misery of to-day was offset by the hope of to-morrow.

*"Rattle his bones over the stones,  
He's only a pauper that nobody owns."*

So ran a jingle of the period that calls up a vision of a pauper funeral over the cobble-stones of London. But of the same day is another poet's exhilaration, i.e.

*"Oh, what a world of profit and delight  
Is open to the studious artisan."*

Thus, as ever, grim misery still walked the streets, while rapt science looked at the sky.

Here, then, was the new industry, with steam that hissed in its pipes, and electric wires all trembling ... great factories ... forests of masts and new stumps of funnels in the sea-ports ... workers flocking to the town industries ... clever artisans who turned into "captains of industry," so rich, so raw, and so different from what had been, that there was a rising fear that "gentlemen" might become extinct—which meant ruin.

And the chief point of the outlook, its focus, so to speak, was found in the new doctrine of liberty, round which was built up a whole new science called political economy which taught that everybody's interest was the same as everybody

else's; that wages and prices and all such things settled themselves if you left them alone. St. Paul's puzzling admonition that every man should pursue every other man's wealth took on a new meaning.

This was in England. In America the prospect was even wider, the pace even more accelerated.<sup>[2]</sup> In the United States in what has been called "the fabulous forties,"<sup>[3]</sup> there were land rushes, gold rushes, cities rising out of frog marshes, banks and steamboats blowing up, and a flood of newcomers and new inventions that boomed half a continent. Nothing like it was ever known before. When Cheops built pyramids he is said to have made a boom in Egypt, ... the Crusades boosted the price of armour and horses; the gold of the New World brought by Cortes and Pizarro sent a wave of economic change all across Europe. But all that was ever seen before was nothing as compared with the booming America of 1842—a hundred years ago. That and the new industry of England, the new commerce, the new science made people ask what the world was coming to. So they had under Cheops.

Yet in reality the world of 1842, as viewed from the world of to-day, was still a very slow world, and it was vastly different from ours. It was a world of great distances, of vague boundaries rich with the promise of a new and better life to be created by the new lands and the new machines. Most people lived their life out in some small corner of the world, never seeing the rest. Most of them never owned any share in the machines that were to transform the world. Yet the promise was there, the opportunity to make of life something more than hopeless drudgery. Fortunes were made out of small investments; an ambitious man could learn a trade and then set up a shop of his own, which might grow to a great enterprise; or a man who saw no other opportunity could satisfy his desire for freedom and independence in the new lands waiting to be settled. Anything seemed possible in this period of hope and faith—faith in one's self and in the future.

To-day there are no new lands, and the machine in a certain sense has become the master, mankind the slave. Most of the habitable world has been explored and appropriated. Invention still goes on, but finds its readiest application in the means of death. Nor can even the industry of peace follow its perpetual changes. Nor is there left any longer the escape from civilization, the new start in the wilderness. The last frontier is vanishing. From our narrowed world there is no getting away, except by what the mathematicians call the velocity of escape—meaning to be fired off into space at the rate of seven miles a second—on which terms no traveller returns.

We cannot wonder that this imprisoned feeling, this loss of one's own control, breeds in many people something like despair, a wistful longing for the "good old times."

[1] W. M. Molesworth, *History of England, 1830-74*.

[2] J. S. Morison, *History of the United States*, vol. i. chaps. 24-31.

[3] M. Minnegerode, *The Fabulous Forties*. 1924.

## THE GOOD AND THE BAD OLD TIMES

For, after all, in the picture of this vanished world there is much that attracts the eye with the colours of romance. We think of its stage coaches, its blazing open fires, its Christmas hospitalities. It seems as if friendship and affection struck in its quiet soil a deeper root, and neighbourliness made life more pleasant. It seems to us a time of adventure, when every journey was a great undertaking and every road led into the unknown; and to the discouraged youth of to-day, a time when ambition was rewarded and achievement was measured only by the will to work.

But in reality there was much in these "good old times" which, when we look at them more closely, appals us with its revelation of human suffering. Almost everywhere in Europe the lot of the poor was sunk to a level below anything known again in times of peace.[1] The slums of the growing cities, rising into the new wealth, carried a burden of human misery that seemed to grow even heavier as national prosperity increased. The criminal law was savage in its brutality, and without compassion. Men and women were hanged for trifling thefts. Torture as legal punishment had passed out in England, but it still claimed its victims in many places. Arbitrary imprisonment in France and elsewhere could still send people to a living death. Even among those undisturbed by violence or wrong, plain labour toiled to the verge of exhaustion, working as much as fourteen hours a day. Everywhere the ignorance that goes with inability to read and write set its stamp upon the people. The shabby, illiterate poor seemed to be of different clay from the well-to-do. Only the vision of a poet like Robert Burns could see in the murk of such an atmosphere that "a man's a man for a' that."

Indeed the lot of the poor in England was cruel hard a hundred years ago.[2] Working-class families lived—except those who died—on 15 to 30 shillings a week. A budget for a family of four shows five-pence a day for each for food, a little over two cents a meal.... A woman going out to work got 12s. 6d. a week; a capable general servant, board and £1 a month. Houses in the city slums, so said a foreign visitor, were the "most horrible dwellings ever yet beheld." The filth among which the poor were obliged to live caused the courts and yards to swarm with flies. Food became putrid almost at once. The country was little better.... Cottages were damp and dark; fever brooded over undrained hamlets; drinking water was polluted; whole counties were underfed.... In certain trades (straw-plaiting) children began work at four years of age; in glove-making plenty of them at five.... Children worked twelve and thirteen hours a day in factories.... Submerged beneath all were the paupers. They were 6 per cent. of the population in England in 1849. Their Workhouse was a cruel thing ... tyranny, squalor, and maybe semi-starvation ... in places the paupers fought like animals for gristly bones.[3]

Death brought what relief it could. One out of every four children born alive was dead within a year. The average age for death was well under forty.

On the surface, above all this, moved the upper class—the lords and ladies, the high society, the scholars and gentlemen, the arts and letters of a great age. Nor could any one of them, with all the pity in the world, relieve at a stroke the distress of their time any more than we can now.

Even in happy America the lot of labour was hard. In the factories of early New England long hours and poor working conditions sapped the vitality of the workers. The wages, though higher than those of Europe, were miserably low compared to our standards of to-day. Across the South lay the dark shadow of slavery. In the early days this lack of human liberty was often mitigated by the kindly paternalism of master towards servant. But with the rise of commercialism this changed to the impersonal, often brutal exploitation of the slaves' energy. Much of the liberty of that period was restricted to the privileged few. True, it no longer existed as the sole right of the aristocracy, but the benefits of the new order seeped very slowly down to the class that had not been born to fortune. Those without such fortunes who did achieve the benefit of economic liberty, did so at the price of danger, hardship and privation on the frontiers of the new land.

[1] Spencer Walpole, *History of England*.

[2] Details from G. M. Young, *Early Victorian England, 1830-65*. 1934.

[3] Poor Law of 1834.

## THE MARCH OF PROGRESS

Thus we must never make the mistake of under-estimating the real social progress that has been made within a century both in America and in Europe. The pace has been slow, the betterment all too little. But slow as it was, more progress was made in this period than in any period in history.

All people in all ages seem to think of their own generation as moving fast. It is doubtful if even the Chinese knew they were virtually standing still. Old people have always shaken their heads at the rapid pace of life, predicting disaster. There may well have been a time when the coming of the windmill and the wheelbarrow seemed as startling as the first flight of the aeroplane. Old people shook their heads over the stage coaches, and their stage-coach children shook theirs over the railway train. Each generation feels that it lives in a fast-moving world. But looking at it in retrospect, we see that the world has moved on in centuries of little change, till here and there some great catastrophe swept over it.

However, at the close of the eighteenth century changes began to come faster, and as they gained momentum, the pace grew faster still. Reforms which in other times would have taken a century were accomplished in a few years. Changes in methods of production were introduced almost overnight by means of new inventions.<sup>[1]</sup> And as each new invention led to other inventions, the changes came faster and faster, bringing with them changes in ideas and making new reforms both possible and necessary—possible because of the new way of life and the new points of view; necessary because of the appalling conditions of working and living which had come with the machine.

A learned man of ancient Greece landing in London about A.D. 1700 would have found much to interest but little to astonish him. There would have been hardly any mechanism or contrivance which he could not understand. Even gunpowder would not have been altogether strange. It was only an improvement on the "Greek Fire," familiar in war four centuries before Christ. Printing would have been comprehensible at sight. But land him in London after the coming of electric light and the telephone (say 1880) and he would dissolve into a very torrent of eager inquiry. Land him to-day among the "movies" with the radio in his ears, and inquiry would die upon his lips.

It is important to realize this vast change in our mechanical world. All our ideals of social control, all our applications of Liberty are conditioned by it. As a result of these changes, the hours of labour have been greatly shortened, from a day of twelve or more to one of eight hours. The conditions of labour have been infinitely improved, and the increase of community welfare—playgrounds, parks and libraries shared in common—marks a new world. Ignorance is vanishing. All people, or nearly all civilized people, can read and write ... if only to plan one another's destruction. We owe at least something to this past century in which Liberty had hoped to enlighten the world. For although the high promises of a century ago have not been fulfilled a long upward path has been ascended. To appreciate this we have only to look back at the milestones of human history since the conscious ideal of liberty emerged in the life and purpose of mankind.

[1] C. D. Wright, *Industrial Evolution and the United States*. 1895.

## LIBERTY IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

The ideal of human liberty and the struggle for freedom did not begin with our modern world of democracy and progress. But in other and earlier times liberty centred round a different thought. We must distinguish here between *national* liberty ... the right of a group of people, a tribe, a nation, to be let alone to manage their own affairs in their own way ... and *individual* liberty ... the right of the individual man to be let alone ... which is quite another matter.

We think, for example, of the liberty of the ancient Greeks. We recall Lord Byron's moving stanzas deploring the sad fate of the Greece of his day, held under the despotism of the Turks; a tyranny now renewed, vastly more brutal, and calling forth the same passionate challenge.



"The mountains look on Marathon,  
And Marathon looks on the sea;  
And musing there an hour alone,  
I dream'd that Greece might still be free;  
For, standing on the Persian's grave,  
I could not deem myself a slave."

But the Greeks in reality were a long way from the individual liberty and equality which we have to-day. The Greeks never thought of "aliens" as equal to themselves. In Athens, as in other Greek city-states, aliens had no political rights; still less had slaves.[1] Yet Athens in a population estimated at something over 300,000 had 160,000 members of citizen families, 90,000 aliens and something over 80,000 slaves. Nor had the Greeks any conception of a general equality as between man and man as the proper basis of society. It seemed, even to Aristotle, that there had to be a lower class of workers, that slavery was a national order. Without a "working-class," it was argued, there could not be an upper class of "gentlemen" devoted to a life of leisure, art and culture. Without these there could be no society, no continuity of national life—or rather these were society—national life—all that mattered. The Greeks disdained alike manual labour and trade and, to their own detriment, all practical application of brilliant mathematical thought. Engineering slept while gentlemen debated philosophy.

This theory of humanity, accepting a fortunate upper class as standing on the shoulders of those below, is older than history, dies hard, and is not yet dead. In our American world, in the United States and Canada, the rough and tumble of pioneer life, the rush and clatter of rising settlements, kept tending to shake all the people together like beans in a bag.[2] The "squire" shook down into a squatter. The immigrant boy shook up into a captain of industry. Classes, or membership in them, only formed to break again. "Shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves in three generations," became a sort of American family motto, as well established as *noblesse oblige*, or the *dum spiro, spero* of the feudal lords. Money doesn't make a "class" but only a seat in one; lose it and you're out.

But in older countries, and notably in England till yesterday, the theory of classes, handed on down from the Greek thought, has proved at one and the same time a basis for society and a brake, if not a barrier, to the movement of progress. It is doubtful if Europe could have survived without the "classes" of feudal society. It is doubtful, to many people, whether Europe, or any other civilized country, can permanently survive with a society based on class—whether class by birth, or class by wealth, or class entrenched by force. Not that we must level down; but we must level up.

The notion of what is called a "class-less society" is one on which all of us interested in human welfare should deeply ponder. Only a little time ago to most plain, practical people it seemed the dream of a visionary; but now, to many, it is the necessary condition that can alone guarantee national existence. Whether this means that there will be no more gentlemen or that everybody will be a gentleman, is another matter.

It was a peculiar consequence of the Greek point of view, as thus described, that the individual as such was of no account as beside the state. We ourselves indeed, in our modern free democracies, think nothing so high, so noble as when the individual sacrifices his life for his country—the last supreme sacrifice. But the Greek point of view was something quite different.[3] It meant that the individual had no rights that could not be sacrificed, by others, for the general welfare. We may pretend to such a view, but on real contact we shrink from it; the killing off of deformed children, putting idiots "out of the way," knocking old people on the head fills us with instinctive horror. Even the painless killing of people hopelessly suffering before an inevitable death leaves us perplexed. The sanctity of human life "beats us out." To the Greek there was no problem in such things as these, and least of all to the Spartans, with whom the citizen's life was cast in an iron mould of authority.

What the Greeks really cherished was the liberty, the independence of their own little city-state—the "*polis*"—a word which has left its mark upon our language with *politics*, *metropolis*, and the distinction of "*polite*" people from rustics. This meant in most cases a city, such as Athens or Sparta with the adjacent villages and countryside, or an island, one of those "Isles of Greece" that dot the blue waters of the Ægean in what then seemed the centre of the world. In

Greece and in its outer colonies there were in all over one hundred city-states. So far did the Greeks carry this idea of independence by isolation that when any group of them migrated to make new settlements, such as those like Syracuse in Sicily and those on the Italian coast, they thought of these settlements at once as free and independent states. The new settlers carried with them their affection for their parent state, their household gods and sacred fires, their written scrolls and remembered knowledge ... but all authority of their parent state over them fell away as their galleys went over the horizon.

Many of the early settlers in America thought of their new homes in the same way. This dream of the independent little state, injuring no man and going its way in peace, has been one of the ideals of European peoples. But the isolation and weakness of these small states has often spelled disaster. This was one of the causes of the downfall of Greece. The great empires of Macedon and Rome drove over the civilization of the Ægean, and did not relinquish their hold until conquests by barbarians, and later by the Turk, destroyed national and individual liberty alike. Such isolation again has at the present hour brought ruin upon what seem the happy independence of Scandinavia, and the sturdy self-reliance of Holland.

[1] Warde Fowler, *The City-State*.

[2] F. J. Turner, *The Frontier in American History*. 1920.

[3] R. H. Murray, *Political Science from Plato to the Present*. 1926.

## THE SHADOW OF THE DARK AND MIDDLE AGES

The Roman Empire disintegrated under the flood of barbarian conquest. What had been the orderly Roman Province of Gaul was swept to ruin and anarchy by the invasion of Germans, Norsemen, Huns and Saracens.[1] "The strangers," says a chronicle, "sacked the towns and villages and laid waste the fields; they burnt down the churches." "The whole country," says another, "is laid waste as far as the Loire; where once were prosperous towns, wild animals now roam." Out of this wreck rose the feudal system as salvation. Little groups of survivors from this carnage and destruction gathered together in fortified places, under leaders strong enough to command and save. The weak gladly commended themselves to the protection of the strong. Henceforth no one held his possessions except as a vassal under the protection of a lord. Throughout this whole order ran the new mystery of the Christian faith, explaining obedience as itself divine, and humility as the path to Heaven.

The feudal system with its complicated arrangements has so long been the bane of the schoolroom, the target for schoolroom wit as the Fuddle System,[2] and the playground of merry parody mocking it across the centuries, that it is hard for us to see it in its true light. In reality it came as the salvation of Europe from anarchy, and sustained it for nearly a thousand years. The essential point was that it offered a fixed setting for social life—answering to some extent our age-long prayer "Give peace in our time, O Lord." For under its organization the lord and the priest, the vassal and the liegeman and the serf, lived in a settled order in which each had his allotted place. There was no question of equality, or of equal rights, but every man had a status or lot of his own, descending from father to son. What seems to most of us in America to-day the grossest social injustice was accepted as a matter of course by those who lived under it. The Barons of the Magna Carta did not think of the vassals and the freemen and the serfs and the slaves beneath them as equal to themselves. In fact they were sure they were not. Each man had his own station and the services and privileges that went with it. He was expected, as the rubric of the Church of England still declares it, to do his duty in that state of life to which it had pleased God to call him. When it was said that each man had the right under an accusation to be tried by his peers, it meant that he had the right to be tried by people as high or as low as he himself was.

We would do well not to condemn too easily nor too entirely this creed and code of the Middle Ages. In our own day, and above all in America, the idea of natural rights and the ideal of individual liberty have been so widespread and

so deeply rooted in the pioneer settlement of our continent that they seem matters of common sense and common justice, needing no verification. Any other order of society excites our indignation.

But we must not too easily dismiss this mediæval conception of duty and obedience without trying to get from it the element of good which it contains.[3] We shall see that the mere assertion of our rights, each for himself, the exaction of the uttermost farthing of our claim, will get us nowhere without an eager willingness towards duty, an acceptance of sacrifice as a part of life. True liberty ... liberty for all ... implies a sacrifice for each one of us of some of his rights in order that other people may have their rights too. During times of war the people of all nations willingly sacrifice their individual rights for the common good. But this spirit, this forgetfulness of self, is needed in the life of peace as well. The more we base our thoughts and stake our future on individual liberty the more must it be enlarged and ennobled by individual sacrifice. What we give thus, we do not lose, or, if it is lost for ourselves, it is given to humanity.

[1] Funck Brentano, *The Middle Ages*. 1922. Cites *Chronicles of Richer and Amboise*.

[2] W. C. Sellar, *1066 and all That*. 1931.

[3] Rev. George O'Brien, *Mediæval Economic Teaching*.

## NATIONAL STATES

The order of the Middle Ages lasted till about the close of the fourteen hundreds. The same generation that saw the discovery of a New World witnessed, without knowing it, the passing of an old. Feudalism, with its distinctive social order, was swept away by the great changes—social, mechanical and intellectual—which passed over Europe as between A.D. 1300 and 1500. Perhaps the most far-reaching was the change in the art of war. All through the Middle Ages the defence beat the attack. A feudal baron in a castle on a rock, with water from deep wells and a store of food, could defy a king for a year; indeed he could defy the whole world. Dover castle, the most complete example of a mediæval fortress in England, covered thirty-four acres. In 1216 it defied all attempts of the French to take it.

That was why no king in England till the close of the Middle Ages was ever more than the most powerful of the barons. Then came gunpowder. The cannon bound with iron hoops that served at the battle of Crécy in 1346, heralded a new world. A king with a train of artillery could presently batter down a castle. In Germany the castle of Friesach was blown open in two days (1414). In England, during the Wars of the Roses, Bamborough Castle was taken by the Earl of Warwick in a week (1469). Feudalism as government was all over. Royal armies replaced feudal contingents. The king came into his own as the head of a new national state. This is the meaning of the new monarchy created in England by Edward IV. and Henry VII. This is the France of Louis XI. and the United Spain of Ferdinand and Isabella. In days of increasing commerce and expanding discovery, of rising cities and growing seaports, the king and the national state served a historic purpose, as obvious as the bygone service of feudalism.

With this change in the art of war came also a great change in the ordered life of the people.[1] The Great Plague known as the Black Death came out of Asia, a hideous germ disease, brought by the caravans in fleas among the bales of goods. It swept across Europe, with nothing to stop it in an ignorant and filthy world. It was accepted as the scourge of God. There was no remedy but prayer. It reached Weymouth in Dorsetshire in 1340. It raged for two years. One and a half million in a population of 4,000,000 died of it. Then it died down, but for three hundred years it never left England. It flared out again in the Great Plague of 1666. It was never killed till enlightened democracy took it by the throat with the sanitation and public health that was the nineteenth century's answer to the prayers of the fourteenth. But the Plague is still ready to leap again out of the filth of Asia, if we carry destruction far enough and cast down humanity low enough. Such forces never sleep. There is much in the history of the Plague that gives us food for thought. It helps us to realize how great have been the triumphs of enlightenment, education and free government.

The changes effected by the Black Death were profound. Beyond doubt the dearth of labour was one great effect. "Sheep and cattle," says a chronicle, "went wandering over the fields with none to go and drive them ... many perished for lack of herdsmen."

As a result, the labour population that was left broke away from its fixed serfdom. In spite of attempts to hold the labourer in his place by acts of parliament, the old system of villeinage, of people tied to the soil, came to its end. "Labour" was henceforth free, if only free to be "out of work." Even after this the law for a long time attempted to keep labourers from leaving their own parishes, to prevent them becoming a charge on another.<sup>[2]</sup> But with the Black Death the feudal mould was broken. The consequences were not all good. Change seldom is. With liberated labour appear in history the familiar "sturdy beggars," and "idle vagabonds," who vexed the Tudor times. Many of these were to figure later, willing or unwilling, as emigrants to America and builders of empire—patriots who left their country for their country's good.

Thus the structure of feudalism underwent a double dilapidation. Military science knocked off the stones above—the dearth of labour undermined the courses below.

Nor was this all. Culture, as well as arms and industry, moved forward. The art of printing, from engraved wooden blocks and then from movable type cast from melted lead, came to Europe about the end of the fourteen hundreds.

William Caxton, England's first printer, printed a hundred different works (1476-91). Hence the "rolls" and "scrolls" of antiquity, painfully copied and recopied, were replaced by books. The scriptorium gave place to the press room. The machine began its mock servitude to man.

This could have meant the education of the people. But no one yet dreamed of that. Printing did, however, spread, and increased knowledge, and aided the Revival of Learning. It helped also to unify language, to create a national speech to overtop national dialects and thus to enlarge the area of government. England under the Tudors, France under the Bourbons, and Spain under the union of Castile and Aragon, now appear as national states. The feudal castles soon turned into the windmills attacked by Don Quixote. Feudalism was "laughed off" as is each phase of our history by the generation that outlives it. Feudalism, indeed, had outlived its time. In many aspects it had run to seed. Knightly honour and chivalry towards women had degenerated into sickly make-believe sentimentality that took love-sick vows, carried round a lady's scarf like a terrier with a rag, and held "courts of love" among billows of silk.<sup>[3]</sup> Knightly adventure still made its pilgrimages and *sauntered* to the Holy Land. But the exchange of a *crusade* for a *saunter* speaks volumes. Such knights and their everlasting vows to their lady now excite a smile. They suggest to us the embittered Republicans or Democrats who vow never to shave till their party is elected. No doubt these Knights of the Unshorn Locks are the lineal descendants of the age of chivalry.

So feudalism, as a political system, ended. In that aspect little remains of it except a few quaint survivals. A feudal tenant "in petty sarjeantry" still presents the King yearly with a pair of dead birds. The Hudson Bay Company holding "in soccage" paid a similar tribute to the King in Canada in 1939. There is still a Norrey King at Arms, and a Pursuivant Lion and other officials suggesting a full house at poker. Socially, feudalism, till only a little while ago, still left its mark across English life in the abiding "gentleman" and the survival of "birth." Historically it ended with the new era of printing, of revived learning, national states, the discovery of the New World of America and the Old World of Asia. This brought an expansion and a rivalry among European powers in which no small feudal state could find a place.

This epoch of national states that began in 1500 with the age of the Tudors, maintained its impetus three hundred years and reached its climax in the eighteenth century. It built up powerful monarchies. But these were tempered at first by the surviving feudal rights of great lords, and the ancient customary rights of the people, and later by new popular forces. For the British people these checks were always strong. They were strengthened further by the conflict in arms of England's Civil War (1642-49).<sup>[4]</sup> Hence there grew up in Great Britain a sort of consciousness of popular rights, not meaning the equality of all the people but meaning, as it were, the right to be left alone, not to be called upon for new taxes, for unknown duties, and not to lose privileges long enjoyed.

The England from which sailed the Pilgrim Fathers and the migrating Massachusetts Bay Company was far from being a land of equality. Hereditary rights—of rule, of property and of privilege—were everywhere embedded in it. Religious tolerance was a hard doctrine to grasp in a day of conflicting creeds for whose adherents salvation depended

on a formula, eternal happiness on a text. The farewell call of the Pilgrims to "dear England" shows how mingled were the thoughts of the time, how much there was to cling to, how much to seek elsewhere. Yet at least the atmosphere was there in which liberty, and presently democracy, might grow.

The passion to be left alone, if only to one's own foolishness, lies deep rooted in British character, a product of centuries far away, a cell-memory from a bygone life, on northern seas and isolated coasts, hard and lonely and self-dependent. Thus an Englishman's house became a castle, his home inviolate, and with his house his mind. It was all his, even if he wanted to keep it empty.

[1] Williams-Ellis and Fisher, *History of English Life*. 1936.

[2] Statute of Labourers, 1351.

[3] e.g. The Court of Love of the Comtesse de Champagne, 1181-87.

[4] G. M. Trevelyan, *History of England*. 1926.

## THE GROWTH OF POPULAR RIGHTS

Here, then, in the British Isles was the setting and the atmosphere in which modern democracy could come to life. In France circumstances entirely different worked towards the same end. In the one case liberty came by evolution, in the other by catastrophe; in England by growing up, in France by smashing down.

In France a great gulf widened more and more between those in power and the general mass of the people. In France, as feudalism ebbed away, it had left the nobility stranded on an island of silk.[1] They had no part, as in England, in national parliament. They still led in war in the royal armies of the king, with quarterings in keeping with their noble blood and their rank as officers. But in peace, the gloom of their country chateaux drove them to the new sunlight of the Palace of Versailles that Louis XIV. had built in 1682. Thus in France the lack of anything intermediate, as civil authority, between the power of the king and the powerlessness of the individual man, was opening a chasm that seemed to invite a downfall.

More than that, the way to popular liberty was being prepared in both countries by the rise of what is called the middle class or the bourgeoisie, meaning to a large extent, "business men." Economic power and privilege began to replace military and political power. The "business man" had been long in coming into his own. The Greeks had despised merchants as "crooks." The Middle Ages regarded them as cheats and their money interest as theft. "To be in trade" was disdained by people whose blood was too blue for it. Yet the great mercantile fortunes and the vast growing apparatus of trade and commerce that handed on to Europe the wealth of the Indies and the produce of America, had by the eighteenth century already raised up both in Britain and in France a new element in the nation.[2] As it became more and more influential, it helped to break by its very expansion the mould in which the rigid world of privilege was cast.

[1] Ed. Lowell, *The Eve of the French Revolution*. 1895.

[2] W. Bowden (and others), *Economic History of Europe since 1750*. 1937.

## REACTION OF AMERICA ON EUROPE

A further influence making towards the new ideal of individual liberty was the reaction of America on Europe. The discovery and settlement of America had enormous effect on the life and character of the peoples of Western Europe. The history of the three centuries from Columbus to the Independence of the United States is often written as if to show the New World as the prize of the old, America as the booty of Europe, the spoil divided by conquering kings and rival empires. Such a view neglects the deeper effects that were being produced on the character and outlook of the people to whom America was thus laid open.

Most of all this effect was exercised on the people of the British Isles. The discovery of America reawoke them to the maritime life that had been slipping away from them. Courage that seemed falling asleep in quiet farmsteads took to the sea again. The Viking came back in the new seamen of the Western Ocean. The nation quickened to new thought and new life.<sup>[1]</sup> The winds of change and chance ruffled to new movement the waters that the long, still years had threatened to stagnate. The sleep of the Middle Ages woke to the songs of Elizabethan England.

Thus maritime enterprise itself was potent in its power to revivify a nation. Equally potent was settlement in America, the vision of an empty world, the recapture of the most ancient kind of liberty, the natural liberty of the man whose very isolation makes him free, whose very danger makes him vigilant. Such a quickened sense of the liberty of a new country came back to England from America.

New it may have seemed, but in a sense it is the oldest liberty of all, and its appeal was an echo of a remote past, found again. At its extreme is complete isolation, the melancholy liberty of Robinson Crusoe, monarch of all he surveyed. Such an extreme compels us to realize that man is a social animal, meaningless by himself, a voice without an ear, an ear without a sound. But short of such extremes a partial isolation, for one strong enough to stand alone, carries a measure of natural liberty. For all primitive races, for isolated tribes, for all pioneers in the forest, circumstance makes for freedom. The very simplicity of their way of living, gaining their support from nature by their own labour and contrivance, sets them free. Where there is little, if any, associated effort, every man is for himself. The buried memory of such a liberty is in each of us. It reveals itself in every boy who ever longed for a desert island. It has been the lure that has led the pioneer farther and farther from the settled countryside. It was this liberty, refound in America, that came back to Europe, and above all to England, to sing into willing ears like the song of the sea.

[1] Stephen Leacock, *Our British Empire*. 1940. (Lane.)

## NATURAL LIBERTY AND JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU

As the doctrine of natural liberty grew in its attraction, as the surge towards it strengthened, it often assumed an exaggerated form, as if to assert that all isolated men were heroic men, and all dwellers in the cities crafty and degenerate. We see this in the poetry and the stories of the eighteenth century. The famous English poet, Alexander Pope (1688-1744), had never been in America, and had never seen savages in the wilderness. Yet he wrote in his *Essay on Man*:

*"Lo, the poor Indian! whose untutored mind  
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind;"*

This noble savage turned into a sort of a stock character.

It became the fashion to praise simple people, poor people, humble people. In his famous *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* Gray talked of the "rude forefathers of the hamlet" as spending their lives "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife." He pleaded that "grandeur" would not "hear with a disdainful smile, the short and simple annals of the

poor." Compare Oliver Goldsmith's

*"Sweet Auburn! loveliest village of the plain,  
Where health and plenty cheered the labouring swain."*

This idea of the merits of native simplicity, of natural ways of living as opposed to artificial, had a great influence in Europe. The eighteenth century was an age of increasing hope, of an increasing aspiration for liberty. New forces were working to make liberty under independence in America and to promote the great upheaval of the French Revolution that began in 1789. No doubt the doctrine which exalted the natural and simple man helped to swell the current.

This doctrine found its highest expression and exercised its greatest influence in the writings of the Frenchman, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778).<sup>[1]</sup> Few people have had more influence on mankind than this man, whose own life was that of a wanderer and a sponge, whose heart was as dry as his tears were wet. For he had the supreme gift of gathering up and expressing the ideas which thousands of others felt but could not express. There is no message so effective as to tell people what they know already, to hold a mirror to their face and a sound board to their voice. So it was with Rousseau. He wrote a book called *Emile*, to show how a natural child could be educated in a natural way. The mothers of the new age, perplexed with its increasing artificiality, caught from Rousseau's mind their own thought. He wrote a book called the *Social Contract*, to show how a natural society could be made of natural men, surrendering liberty only to receive it back again. As from a magician's touch, out leaped from the pages "the individual," the liberated man, entering into his own, the man only half recognized by the Greeks, scourged by the Romans, lost in the dungeons in the Middle Ages, and surviving only among noble savages, his existence nowhere assured except on the sands of a desert island, or by the freedom of a mountaineer, too high up to catch.

[1] C. W. Hendel, *Rousseau, 1712-78*. 1937.

## AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

The theory of liberty and equality formulated by Rousseau and others was a part of the new "age of reason" of the eighteenth century. It is often referred to as the period of the "enlightenment," and to many at the time it seemed as if a flood of light had appeared to illuminate all things human with the beams of plain reason. The light shone clear because the darkness of bigotry, the mists of prejudice, and the heavy fog of error and authority were being driven away.

Many of us still feel that this is largely true. Theorists tell us that we cannot judge things in a general and abstract way, as the enthusiasts of the enlightenment were apt to do. We must take each case as we find it. Every country and every epoch, they tell us, has its peculiar circumstances, not only of physical surroundings but of institutions which have come down as a part of its history. Social inequalities and hereditary privileges, monarchies and all that went with them, established churches with powers and privileges ... all these things we must accept as we find them as part of a "going concern," or what the biologists call "an organic life." We may alter them gradually and helpfully, but always and only at a certain pace, for fear that alteration will spell destruction. We cannot, it is argued, set up one single code of law, one simple framework of rights that will apply to all people in all places. Such things as "slavery" may be proper and even indispensable in certain stages of society. The hereditary rights of the few may aid the salvation of all, and an established church, by its very wealth and power, may be able to maintain offices of piety and pity, to succour the poor, to encourage learning and to do such things as in a rude and cruel age would otherwise pass undone. This view of society is commonly called a historical or relative view. The more some people think of it, the more they find it true, the wider they find its application. The more other people think of it the worse they hate it. It would always seem as if there were here a general division of human minds into two classes. It would appear to justify the jest of the Gilbert and

Sullivan opera that "every boy and every gal that's born into this world alive is either a little Liberal or else a little Conservative." Most of all have the historical theorists attacked Rousseau's doctrine of liberty under a social contract. It has indeed long since been declared "exploded," a favourite process of theorists who fail to drive a thing away by argument. It is of course ridiculous to say that men enter society by a "contract" since we are all born into it without choice. Indeed we have little meaning, singly, without our fellowmen; speech needs ears to hear it; a child implies a parent. Our thought, our very merriment, are things we share with others. Laughter is the happiest of all human emotions, but only a Scotsman cares to have a joke all to himself.

Yet the more utterly we cast out the social contract doctrine, the more it insists on coming back, or at least making its appeal. It is like the Arkansas mule that refuses to die. The truth is that there lies at the basis of the social contract doctrine an insistence on individual rights which is worth keeping if only as a metaphor.

Hence the great power exercised by such ideas in the days when American, and presently European governments, were being remade (1776-1800). Especially is this true of the idea of "equality" as a basis for society. This was, as far as anything can be, new. The church had long since recognized the equality of all men; but this equality was to be realized in Heaven. In a sense all Roman citizens were "equal," but after the simpler republican days Rome did not organize the Empire on equal rights. Here and there was seen an equality such as that of Swiss peasants, all poor, or none rich enough to cast a shadow; or the equality of monastic societies or brotherhoods or sects, who received their equality, however, only as equals in poverty and renunciation.

There was, most conspicuous in all the world, the "equality" of America, of the happy homesteads where even the richest was poor and the poorest had in abundance; such equality as Longfellow wove around Evangeline and Acadia, or as the French soldiers of the War of Independence saw and admired among the farmsteads of Rhode Island. But this was mainly an equality of fact and happy circumstance, where land was free and nature bountiful, not yet an equality of design and contrivance. There was plenty of inequality, even apart from slavery, in colonial America. Few people were yet prepared to urge a universal suffrage and the more established people still cherished a dream of benevolent government by the best, meaning, as such dreams are apt to do, by themselves.

Hence not even in America and far less in Europe had people in general caught the idea of organizing a whole society, a state, an army, a church, and with them all, civic and commercial life, on the principle that all men are equal.

## **THE RIGHTS OF MAN AND OF THE CITIZEN**

Such was the new doctrine of liberty that formed the central thought of the French Revolution at its beginning in 1789. Patriots' hearts everywhere welcomed the new doctrines. Poets, such as the young Southey, sang in the sunrise. Fox, the famous British statesman—bibulous, large-hearted and enthusiastic—saw in the fall of the Bastille the greatest event of the ages. Only a few people of longer vision, or of soberer or sourer thought, such as Edmund Burke,<sup>[1]</sup> Fox's fellow Whig, saw disaster ahead. To most of Burke's enthusiastic fellow-citizens he sounded like a croaking raven on a bough. The world seemed full ahead for liberty.

It was this liberty which was written into the famous *Declaration of the Rights of Man* adopted by the new French National Constituent Assembly and presently made the opening section of the Constitution of 1791.<sup>[2]</sup> Henceforth it became one of the world's charter documents like the Magna Carta of 1215 and the Declaration of Independence of 1776. The doctrine was written into the Constitution in explicit terms, precise as French thought itself. British and American institutions and charters can tolerate hopeless ambiguities as long as we think we know what we mean. We can declare a union indissoluble with the provision that any member can get out of it at will, as in the American Articles of Confederation of 1777 and the British Commonwealth Statute of Westminster of 1931. German thought moves in such a thick fog of language that few outsiders can grasp it. But the French like to try to say what they mean.



Hence the French wrote into this document of 1791, the first of their many Constitutions, the principle of the equality of all men, of the social contract as the basis of organized society, and above all, the principle of individual liberty. "*Men are born free and equal in rights,*" says the first Article of the Constitution. "*Liberty,*" declares Article Three, "*consists in being permitted to do anything which does not injure other people.*" The same article adds that, "*The exercise of the natural rights of each man has no limits except those which guarantee to the other members of society the enjoyment of the same rights.*"

This theory of liberty, the Golden Rule of Liberty, as it was later called, has been affirmed and reaffirmed for a century and a half since thus firmly written. It carried in it the basis of the triumphant European liberalism of the nineteenth century. It laid down as a principle something which corresponded to the natural temperament of the British and the natural environment of the Americans. It shone as with the light of a star in the East, presaging a new gospel of hope for those still sitting in darkness under the tyranny of Hapsburgs and Hohenzollerns and Romanoffs. It was for the sake of these principles that the French revolutionary movement assumed in its earliest stages an international aspect, a world appeal.[3] "The National Convention," so ran the famous Decree of November 19, 1792, "declares in the name of the French nation, that it would extend fraternity and help to all peoples who want to recover their liberty." The French conquerors entered the cities of the Rhine garlanded with flowers and heralded with acclaim. Nor did these appeals fail till the Constitution of 1791 had been torn asunder and smeared with blood. In spite of all, something of it lingered till the very end of the epoch. Even now, for many of us, this doctrine of liberty still stands as clearly graven as ever.

[1] *Reflections on the French Revolution*. 1790.

[2] F. A. Hélie, *Les Constitutions de la France*. 1880.

[1] A. Sorel, *Europe and the French Revolution*. Eight vols.

## THE NEW LIGHT BURNS DIM

But the difficulty, then and now, has always been with the application of this doctrine of liberty. What is the point at which I begin to interfere with my neighbour's rights, or he with mine? Those rights can perhaps be fairly well distinguished in a simple society, each man living on his own as among hunters and fishermen, or even pioneer farmers. But with every stage of social advance life gets more complicated, more intertwined. More things have to be done by associated effort and each man's rights against his fellow become more and more limited by the demands of the general welfare.

The further difficulty is added that everybody must act up to the rule or else nobody can. If all men are to be equal every man must know that the others will play their part towards him. There is a charming old fable, told or retold by the French poet La Fontaine, who lived in the days of Louis the Fourteenth. It tells how a fox came across a hen which had taken refuge in a tree. "Come down, dear friend," said the fox, "have no fear. The animals have made a general peace." "Very good," said the hen, "and let us greet these two hounds that I see running this way." "Ah!" said the fox, beginning to move off, "the hounds may not have heard of the peace."

La Fontaine's vision looked ahead to the difficulties of France a hundred years later. The new-born liberty and equality in France, in its first structure, went to pieces like a house of cards. The great mass of people, being without much property or education or political experience, were called "passive citizens" and had no vote. But what is "passive" seldom stays on. The new ideas fermenting in the mass brought violence, insurrection, the destruction of vested rights and clerical privilege, then foreign invasion and war (1792).[1] For the time the new French Liberty went under, or joined hands with the new Terror, fighting for national existence.

Then followed (1799-1815) the autocratic government of the Napoleonic regime, in a period of mingled prosperity and misery, grandeur and despotism. The dark shadows of recurrent wars and unstable peace chased over Europe like

the clouds across a harvest field. Only here and there the Great War, as we once called it, the war of 1792-1815, resembled the horrors that now make it seem reverting to the full ferocity of slaughter, unknown since the barbarian ravages, but returned again at the present hour. For vast numbers of people in all countries life was happier and more spacious in the Napoleonic days than for a generation after. For each locality war came and passed in thunder like a storm, fought mainly as between soldiers, with pity for the fallen, mercy for the conquered and honour to the brave. Marshal Ney erected at Corunna a monument to Sir John Moore buried beside its ramparts. The greatest tragedy of the epoch, the loss of the Grand Army in Russia in 1812, was at the hand of nature, not of man, a grim reminder of the power of elemental forces.[2] It is poor history and fool philosophy to try to draw parallels between those days and now. There are none.

[2] J. H. Rose, *Revolutionary and Napoleonic Era*.

[3] W. F. P. Napier, *The Peninsular War*.

## THE GREAT PEACE AND INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

But the Great Peace that followed the victory of Waterloo (1815) soon showed an altered scene. In a financial crash at the close of the war, the false structure of war prosperity was carried away like a log-jam in a river, disastrous for the moment, but presently letting loose the steadier streams of lasting abundance. An era opened utterly unlike the past. The United States, indeed all North America, came into its own as the new home of the distressed, the land of hope, of bread and work for all, of "equality," outspoken and even braggart and vulgar ... but still equality. With the peace the doctrine of liberty, national and individual, sprang again to life, the world over, as the seedlings rise among the stumps of the cleared forest.

It rose all the more rapidly because it now rested on a wider and more practical basis than ever before. Individual liberty in this rising world meant not mere political liberty, but economic liberty—the right to buy and sell, to manufacture, to trade, and to invest, to migrate or move, work or refuse to, according to the dictates of one's own interest. Thus was the gist of the new political economy that rose in the world of factory industry and world commerce that followed the Napoleonic war. To its enthusiastic advocates this world of industrial liberty under free competition, with equal opportunity for all, seemed like the opening of a millennium of human happiness. Man's chains were to be struck off by political liberty; his poverty to be abolished by economic opportunity; his idle armies to disband in universal brotherhood; and even crime grow weary of its needless trade. Such was the vision seen by Richard Cobden, the great English leader of the Free Trade Movement (1815-46), and of the apostles of liberty both in Europe and America. Was it sunrise, or only a mirage that showed a green oasis in the desert where all was dead sand? There are those who think that the vision can yet come true.

The Industrial Revolution, the age of invention and machinery, had begun, in the technical sense, well back in the eighteenth century.[1] But its results were little felt for most of mankind till the Great Peace of the nineteenth century. They were obscured and impeded by the almost unbroken wars of the sixty years from the outbreak of the Seven Years' War (1755) till Waterloo (1815). But the process of invention had begun, and invention in each industry called for similar progress and invention in others. The invention of improved spinning machinery by Richard Arkwright and others (1769) removed the industry from the home and put it into factories. Better spinning meant a demand for quicker weaving and brought the power loom (1786), one of the first things "invented to order." All this meant a need for more power and brought on the use of steam, a thing that had wheezed its way down centuries of queer and useless experiments. It was now set to pump mines, then made to turn wheels of machinery, and then (later) to get up on its own platform, turn its own wheels and run away as a steamboat, like the *Claremont* on the Hudson in 1807, or faster still as a locomotive, such as Stephenson's famous *Rocket* at Liverpool, 1830. All this needed iron, more than could be smelted in wood fires; hence arose the new giant industries of coal and iron, the grimy twins that held up England for half a century.

Bigger industry needed better transport. Ditches turned into canals, a network over England. Highways, "macadamized" by a Mr Macadam, recalled the forgotten glories of Rome. Steam took to the open sea. Most of all, America began that eager thrust towards invention which presently led the world. For the calls towards invention came across from Europe to America with the new need for more materials for the rising machine industry. Cotton, plucked clean by hand, was too slow in the getting. The cotton gin, another deliberate contrivance, was invented by Eli Whitney (1794) because it had to be.

In other words there came into this altering epoch, and chiefly in America, the process of self-conscious invention, [2] a thing now stamped deep on the American mind. Labour in America was short. Every frontier farmer had to be a sort of Archimedes, contriving and whittling to get something that would let one man do the work of two, and presently of ten. This was really a novel phase of human life, this deliberate trying to invent. The Chinese long, long ago invented wonderful things—the use of wheels, the processes of weaving and dyeing and working metals, and a set of picture signs to tell about it all, stamping them on plates to make books. This done, they fell fast asleep over the picture signs and sacred books, and woke to the thunder of foreign conquest.

The Greeks cared nothing for invention nor for mechanical work. They preferred, as the University of Cambridge is still said to do, things that were "no good." Among them such a man as Archimedes of Syracuse was an exception.[3] Archimedes invented machines and screws and contrivances of fire and flame to defend his native city against the Romans. He once said that if he had a place to stand he could move the world, with a lever long enough. But the Greeks wouldn't have given him one, even if they had had it. They cared nothing for such things.

The Romans invented little. They were administrators, not thinkers. Apart from the codification of law, they largely took their intellectual life from smarter people than themselves. The Arabs were better. But their speculations and their advance were largely intellectual and not mechanical.

The Dark and Middle Ages knew nothing of invention, worked by rule of thumb, and feared all mysterious knowledge and "black art" as the work of the devil. Roger Bacon of Oxford (1214-1292), who discussed much and suspected more, might have set the clock forward by centuries.[4] To prevent it he was "concentrated" by the authorities.

It remained therefore for the age of liberty to be the age of progress. It seemed as if man's increased knowledge of nature, his ability to make fire and water work for him, work instead of him, must place him beyond all reach of want. It still seems so. The shivering savage must go hungry when game fails, but not mankind, equipped with the power of the lightning and the waterfall. The paradox is still there, the inconsistency ever greater. Each new saving of labour seems to mean new wants. Each new mechanism of life turns to an added instrument of death. We are still seeking, collectively, our means of salvation. Unless our faith is vain, somewhere yet, in liberty and in justice, it will be found.

[1] W. Cunningham, *Growth of English Industry and Commerce*, vol. iii.

[2] E. W. Bryce, *Progress of Invention in the Nineteenth Century*.

[3] Sir T. L. Heath, *Archimedes*. 1920.

[4] Sedgwick and Tyler, *Short History of Science*. 1929.

## ENTER POLITICAL ECONOMY

The rising theory of individual economic liberty found its first large expression in the famous *Wealth of Nations* published by Adam Smith in 1776. This treatise was partly intended to show how the American colonies could be

permanently maintained, and it came out in the year when they were lost. But the main theme was that of enlightened self-interest, the proposition that each man, when left free to pursue his own advantage as he sees it, will be led "by an invisible hand" to promote the welfare of all.[1] Hence absolutely free competition becomes the sole rule for social guidance. The government need not meddle or interfere with trade or industry by setting up tariffs or regulating wages. "The world runs by itself," said one of Adam Smith's contemporaries. The whole doctrine is so simple in its outline that it can be written out, as has been said, on half a sheet of paper.

But Adam Smith was a Scot, thorough and cautious. He made a job of it, took twelve years and a thousand pages, and when the book was done there was nothing more to say for a generation. The *Wealth of Nations* was a great literary success. Pitt, the prime minister, declared himself Smith's pupil, and expressed his intention of carrying his doctrines into practice ... later on. So have others expressed the same intention ever since. The world, with modifications, still says it. But in Pitt's day war forbade change. It remained for the generation after Pitt, both in England and America, during the free trade era to attempt to put it into practice. And it remained for John Stuart Mill to fortify and enlarge Smith's industrial liberty by building into it the framework of individual freedom.

[1] *Wealth of Nations*, book iv, chap. ii.

## JOHN STUART MILL

This gifted man (1806-73) was one of the makers of the modern world. He was as clever as he was laborious, and as noble-minded as he was clear-headed. His working life was largely spent in the dull routine of the London office of the old East India Company.[1] Later, when let free, he sat in Parliament, but pleased nobody because he was too honest for everybody. But his great writings, his *Political Economy* (1848) and his *Liberty* (1859), were overtime work, Mill's real life achievement. Lesser people, who also must do the work they like best in hours stolen from those of rest, may take comfort in the fact that much of the world's best work has been done in this way.

Mill's *Liberty* became a sort of gospel. It is the best expression ever given to the reasoned idea of individual freedom, enjoyed in association with one's fellows. Mill takes the ground of the Golden Rule, that a man may do anything that he wishes to if he does not therefore injure his fellowmen. The "government" has no right to interfere with him, not even for his own good, as long as he is not injuring other people. In Mill's time people commonly preferred the plain word "government" to mean what is meant now by the mistier and more uncertain term "the state." The one seems to mean a set of men, the other sounds like an abstraction. Everyone must judge for himself which is the better or the worse for his use. There is error and danger either way.

The primary function of government as seen by Mill and his school was the protection of people from force or fraud, that is, defence in war, safety in peace against violence, and security against cheating. But Mill admitted that the government may go much further than this. It may undertake public works of general usefulness, the making of roads and bridges, docks and harbours, the aid of navigation, the lighting of streets and the thousand and one things which are necessary to an associated, advanced society, but which must be done collectively or not done at all. Hence the government enters on a wide field of activity, reaping a wide harvest of taxes.

Few except anarchists would deny these functions of government. But the case gets less clear, when we turn from roads and bridges to public parks and public libraries and museums and all the apparatus of culture. To Mill of course, as the child of books, whose kingdom was the mind, the case was clear. His wish outran his logic. The government, as he saw it, could properly purvey all these things to its citizens. Few people indeed will doubt this. But whether this is really a doctrine of liberty, or a rather different doctrine of social solidarity, or collective action, is not so certain.[2]

Mill went further. He took in education and was all for the public school in the American sense of the school for everybody. Here again the case, as liberty, is not clear. If we make childless people pay taxes to send other people's

children to school, we seem to be off the track of liberty or at least not in the middle of the road. If we compel a parent to send his child to school and compel the child to go, when both of them object to it, then somebody's liberty is violated. For the parent and the child, collectively, are the custodian of the child's liberty; unless indeed the state replaces the mother and the father, which would open the door so wide to an inrush of follies that Mill's doctrine would be blown out of the window. These difficulties one mentions to show how hard it is to follow consistently the thread of a single principle in a maze of circumstance.

But where Mill stands with his feet firm is on the right of the individual to his opinion, and his right to give it expression ... all that goes under the familiar phrases, liberty of conscience and free speech. These things of course had not waited for Mill to formulate them. They had found expression in the Constitution of the United States, where they were the basis of the original ten amendments. To what extent altered by our new mechanisms of communications, to what extent suspended in war and national emergency, will be discussed later on. But John Stuart Mill spoke for all time in his immortal dictum that there must be some "part of the life of every person within which the individuality of that person ought to reign uncontrolled ... some space in human existence thus entrenched around and sacred from authoritative intrusion."<sup>[3]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> *Autobiography*. 1873.

<sup>[2]</sup> H. Laski, *Liberty in the Modern State*. 1930. (Allen & Unwin.)

<sup>[3]</sup> *Political Economy*, book v, chap. xi.

## ANARCHISM AND WOOL-GATHERING

Every current has its eddies of counter current; every movement of thought its extremes and its reactions. So it was with the movement of democracy and liberty in the nineteenth century. It called forth opposing movements of reaction, conservatism and suppression; and it also bred the extreme of liberty known as anarchism, and the search for liberty in a different direction called socialism.

People have long since learned to connect anarchism with terrorism, assassination, the throwing of bombs and the sudden and appalling deaths of European sovereigns at the hands of terrorists. This was the hideous form and meaning given to anarchism by the Russian terrorist Michael Bakunin and his associates and imitators. The original anarchism was a philosophical doctrine bold in the academic sense but harmless as a professorial lecture.<sup>[1]</sup> It is a theory of the absolute and complete liberty of the individual. We find it laid down first (about 1844) by an obscure young German, Caspar Schmidt (writing as Max Stirner), in a pamphlet called *The Individual and His Property*. Here is preached the terrific doctrine that the individual is entitled to do anything he is able to do. He is absolute lord of creation provided he can "make good"; "I am entitled," said Stirner, "to overthrow God if I can." Luckily he couldn't. He probably didn't expect to. His little pamphlet was meekly dedicated, "*To my sweetheart*," as a pretty, lover's gift. Yet this and other little rills made up a stream that presently turned to the hideous doctrine of selfishness and the power of might, voiced in the writings of the German philosopher, Nietzsche.

But "philosophical anarchism" is another matter. It claims that there is no need for government at all. If you and I want to do anything in common we can do it by voluntary agreement. Our neighbours can join in with us. If we need protection at night we can club together and hire a watchman. That scheme of course is admirable for arranging a picnic or a fraternity dance, but mere insanity as applied to the conduct of all society. Neighbours as friendly and jolly and united as that wouldn't need a policeman anyway. They would just call in the thieves and get them to join, too. But it is the very fact that all people can't agree, that some will, and some won't, that forces the compulsion of authority.<sup>[2]</sup>

Many prominent writers, it is true, have wanted to reduce government to a minimum, far less than that of Mill. The celebrated Wilhelm von Humboldt, a German writer of the closing eighteenth century, claimed that even state education

is all wrong; that it stifles individual effort, obliterates variation and tends to run people to a type. What Humboldt forgot is that state education is at least better than no education, which is exactly what most people would get without it. Herbert Spencer, England's great national philosopher of the Victorian days, was all against state interference. He thought that the government of necessity did everything badly; that even the post office would be better as a private competitive enterprise, like an express company, as we are told it used to be in China.

In America the very circumstances of settlement in a new country bred independence and the desire for a minimum of government control. Yet even in America governmental functions had to be greatly expanded almost from the start. A national bank was established; roads and canals were constructed; new lands were purchased; though not one of these powers did the United States Constitution directly confer upon Congress.[3]

In short, any government must not only protect its citizens, but it must act positively in many ways for the general welfare. The doctrine of anarchism becomes meaningless when taken from the arm-chair of the philosopher and applied to large groups.

[1] E. V. Zenker, *Anarchism*. 1898.

[2] Bertrand Russell, *Roads to Freedom*. N.D. (Allen & Unwin.)

[3] *Life of Henry Clay*. 1899. American Statesmen Series.

## THE VISION OF SOCIALISM

Very different is socialism. If anarchy walks on one side of the road, socialism shadows the other. In a sense it is no new thing. Socialism has always been with us. But in its earlier forms, as in the Middle Ages among brotherhoods and such, it was a doctrine of the next world, not of this.[1] Pious men pooled their property because all property was as grass. They taught that to work was to pray, not that to work was to make money. But modern socialism came in with the machine age. It takes its departure from the ground that such things as equality, the right to vote, and free competition will not of themselves warm the body or feed the stomach. More than that, it was argued, as by Karl Marx (1818-83),[2] the great apostle of the socialists, that the more free the competition the more the weak are trampled by the strong. People with no property, he says, have to sell their labour power to people with property, who wouldn't buy it unless it brought in more than they gave for it. Seen thus, individual liberty and equality are not bread but a stone. What does it profit a man to have the right to refuse work, if refusal means starvation?

Socialism, therefore, starts with the idea of all people working together, under their own joint management and sharing up the product. It is a beautiful picture. There is only one difficulty with it—that it has never yet worked.

Marx prepared the way for socialism by his gloomy picture of wage-slavery and of an impending social catastrophe. The rich and the poor were to draw further and further apart till the crash came and the world would be rebuilt. Since then socialism has appeared and reappeared in altering forms, written out with a hundred variations. It is presented as the "socializing" of all the nation into one productive machine, or as uniting the people in socialized municipalities, or joining them up into huge socialized industries, each a unit (syndicalism). It is presented as coming by catastrophe, by revolution, or by a single stroke of transformation (the government swallowing all the industries at once), or as coming so gradually that nobody need be afraid of it.[3]

The most familiar picture of socialism shows a nation all organized into a disciplined army of workers, assigned to different trades and moved in and out according as to whether more of one thing or more of another is wanted. If the workers don't like any one kind of job, such as coal-mining, then the hours are shortened and wages increased, till the whole thing fits like a simultaneous equation in algebra. The direction of what to do and when and how to do it, is left to a board of elected officials, generally pictured as wise old men, if need be with flowing beards.[4]

The delusion that beards flow and that old men are wise dies hard. But the notion will intrude itself that some of the wise old men might be clean-shaven and crooked, and give the soft jobs and the high pay to their own crowd. For there at once the difficult question arises—How are wages regulated? Do all people get the same? Or do some people get more if they are more skilled or more industrious? It's no use to say that under socialism people don't use money. A "charge account" or a "book credit" or a "labour-hour-certificate" is the same thing. If all the pay is the same, then socialism only sets up a loafer's paradise. The socialist harvester would doze beside a hedge, the socialist factory hand would feel a little tired and sleep until eleven. Even the benevolent old men would quit the office and go and play bridge in the club, if there was one.

The truth is, we are not so constituted as to work like that. Voluntary effort may last for a spurt of enthusiasm, may rise to heroic strength in emergency or danger or war, but as the day-to-day support of the world's work it would break like a reed.

But worse still would be to make everybody work ... to have underneath the wise old men a set of inspectors and time checkers ... there's no end to it. That's back again to the galleys, to the slaves, to oriental despotism. The love of work is a glorious impulse, but there are sharp limits to it. People love to work on their own, for themselves and those near them; there is a "magic of property," of having something to call your own. No community-share in a public park can have the meaning of one square rod of a backyard garden, all your own. To say that inventors and scientists and thinkers work for work's sake is to be mixed as to what work is. They are not working; they are playing. So is a millionaire financier who never takes a holiday. He never needs one. It's all holiday to him.

It is proper, however, to pay to the *idea* of socialism, not to the practice of it, the tribute which fittingly belongs to it. There can be no doubt of the underlying inspiration which explains its appeal to younger minds, to people entering upon life and cherishing high ideals. The notion of all people working together in cheerful comradeship sounds vastly better, after all, than the stingy maxim, "every man for himself." The only difficulty with socialism, as said above, is that it doesn't yet work; it is too good; if the day ever comes when we are good enough for such a system, then we shall need no system at all.

The difficulty has been that the world, especially the English-speaking world of Britain and America, too quickly accepted democracy, liberty and equality, as a closed chapter of history, a permanent advance from which no retrogression need be feared. We did not realize that for these great things there is a price to be paid, a constant vigilance which is the price of liberty and, for democracy, the constant presence of the inspiration which first inspired it. Without vigilance liberty is suppressed. Without inspiration democracy is just a form, an empty and deserted house for thieves to meet in.

[1] B. Jarrett, *Medieval Socialism*. N.D.

[2] *Capital*. 1867. (Both English translations. Allen & Unwin.)

[3] C. E. M. Joad, *Modern Political Theory*. 1924.

[4] Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward*.

## NATIONAL LIBERTY AND UNITY

Let us examine the difficulties that have impeded the progress of humanity in achieving the blessings of liberty that seemed so definitely on the way a hundred years ago. Liberty, as we have seen, when it broke on the modern world was both for the nation and the individual. Each became an inspiration. The right of every nation to govern itself is the broad

basis of the Declaration of Independence. Revolutionary France offered its help to all nations struggling to be free. The call echoed over Europe. It awoke the nationalism that was to be the main impetus of European public life in the nineteenth century. It turned against the French themselves. Nations, not kings, cast down Napoleon. Germany had its war of Liberation. Italy awoke the sympathy of all the world in its effort towards national unity and liberty (1848-1871). Hungary revived its national consciousness and retaught itself its own language.[1]

The circumstances of the era fortunately allowed this movement to proceed in large masses over large areas. Nationalism was not yet broken up by separatism and particularism, or at least the movement was towards union not partition, as it was later. Thus does a shifting ice-pack, moving with the varying wind, now join and now disintegrate. Hence no close inquiry seems necessary as to what a "nation" is. Yet evidently the idea is not a simple one. A "nation" in this political sense of union need not be all of one descent, as witness France or Britain; nor of one language, as witness Switzerland; nor one religion, as witness almost any country; nor must its territory be contiguous, as witness the Isles of Greece.

The real bond of union, the underlying bedrock on which the structure of a nation rests, is the willingness to unite, the unity of heart that takes the opportunity that is given. We can see it now as it could not be seen before, now when stress is laid not on unity but on differences, on the separate rights, and the particular privileges that are to safeguard minorities. National union in Europe has been shipwrecked on the rock of minority rights. Nor can any scheme of proportional representation avail, any more than a bandage can heal a broken limb that will not join itself.

[1] E. R. Turner, *Europe, 1789-1910*. 1920.

## THE UNITED STATES UNITED

Here America, meaning the United States, was happy. There was no disrupting minority. In the great formative days, let us say the sixty years, 1820-1880,[1] the immigration from Europe was poured into the mould that the old colonial establishment had set and which independence had hardened. But those who came asked no better than to be Americans; and those who welcomed them asked no better than to have them so. Here was no question of special privilege of creed or race or language. Set in the mind of each newcomer was the "idea" of a republic, of a land of freedom where he would find, and help to extend, opportunity and equality.[2] Thus was made a nation—without kindred of descent, or common language of the past, or common history. It was made by good will, the only force in the long run that makes anything politically.

In some happy day the present shadow will be withdrawn from the face of Europe. How it shall then manage to remake its nationalities into concordant states, seems more than the wisest of us can foresee. It may well be that in various European areas, otherwise united into one state, special provisions may be needed in regard to schools, to language used in the courts, etc. Such separatism as that implies can co-exist with perfect friendliness and content. This has long since been in Switzerland and in Canada. But no union can exist without the will and the spirit. Special rights and minority privileges that are the outcome of mutual distrust and ill-smothered animosity are pregnant with disaster. They make a house that is divided against itself and must fall. At the best they are a temporary structure, a trestle across a chasm waiting till time shall fill in something more enduring.

Thus does national unity appear to us much more difficult and complicated than it did to our grandfathers. Thus have the once triumphant notes of the song of national freedom that cheered its march grown harsh with discord. This does not deny its existence or its value. It only means that the road is longer than the world thought, the march more arduous.



[1] A. De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*.

[2] James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*. 1888.

## INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY AND MASS INDUSTRY

The same is true of all that goes with individual liberty, with economic freedom, with equality and democracy. The goal is still the same but we have yet to reach it; nor must we be turned from the path because it is steeper than we thought. Take, for example, the very virtue and value of the elective principle itself. When the first fire of consecration to democracy began to burn low, it appeared that, in and of themselves, elections couldn't make democracy, for democracy is a spirit. It appeared that free voters could be bribed, cajoled, bamboozled, that the people's representatives could be crooked, and that the people themselves could be stampeded into sudden anger, misled into cruel injustice or victimized by their own ignorance.[1] This last consideration merits attention. Modern social structure on its mechanical side (power projects and public utilities) is too technical for common comprehension. Nothing can avail but the selection of honest and able men by honest voters; which puts democracy back to where it started—inspiration or nothing.

Similar difficulties surround the problem of free thought and free speech in an altered world. There was an old Roman saying, "A word is no sooner spoken than it is gone never to be recalled." They meant it to contrast with written words, which remain. But in our time it takes on a new meaning. A thing once said over the radio, or carried by the world-wide press, moves so fast, and so far that it never can be absolutely contradicted. The taint of an evil accusation still remains, nor can any penalty imposed afterwards altogether remove it. Hence all laws about libel and censorship and such things have to be reconsidered in this new light. In early days if a man was called a horse-thief and triumphantly proved in a court of law that he wasn't, that settled it. He came out, as they used to say, "without a stain on his character," in fact, something of a hero. But very different now. Call a man a public thief over the radio and away it goes like the Roman word. Most people never hear the contradiction, or merely say, "It was denied," which is our up-to-date way of saying that perhaps a thing is true and perhaps not. Hence the case for censorship must be argued on new grounds. Freedom of thought and freedom of speech can be turned against liberty instead of enlisted in its service. Wealth in control of utterance can shout poverty down.[2]

It almost seems as if the snakes of evil were only cast out in one direction to crawl in from another. Man's fight against untruth never ends. Even if freedom of thought and liberty of belief are fully granted, they may be attacked again by the newer method, not of trying to compel people to believe, but of cheating them into believing. This is called propaganda, and is largely a name for old lies back in new forms. There is the same new difficulty, the economic liberty and the free competition—and the world that was to run itself once Adam Smith had set it spinning. There was so much on which its earlier prophets had not calculated, so much that they could not possibly foresee. There was, unseen, the question of the right of "property" and especially of property in land. Our great-grandfathers gave it little thought. In America, especially, land was so boundless that no one cared whether George Washington owned a hundred and fifty acres or a hundred and fifty thousand.[3] There was plenty anyway. Similarly, the inheritance and the bequest of property seemed as natural as death itself. He who went away gave his goods to those he left behind. To many pious and well-to-do people such ideas about ownership and property and the sanctity of the owner's dying wish, seemed part of the structure of social life, beyond man's right to alter.

This notion of the sanctity of property clung especially to property in land. The idea existed in Britain and America. In Great Britain it worked increasing hardship—the enclosures, the dispossession of the Highland crofters, the Irish evictions. In America, as said, for a long time it made little difference since land was plenty.[4] But circumstances presently showed it otherwise. There came a day when all the free land was gone. The landless man had lost his natural right to the soil. There came a day when the growth of great cities raised the selling value of land to ten or even a hundred times its earlier price; and this, very often, without effort or risk for its owner, who grew rich by doing nothing. The fierce light thrown upon such gains by Henry George in his book *Progress and Poverty* (1879) has altered our whole conception of the extent of the right of property in land.

We now see that ownership of land must be limited by a certain responsibility about its use. The owner can no

longer "do what he wants with his own." That depends on what he wants to do. If he means to leave his land idle and undeveloped, then the government may expropriate it for other uses. Nor has he the right to expect to get for himself the full increase in value that may come to his property because other people develop property near it. Some of this increase may reasonably be taken away by taxes.

In the same way a hundred years ago the rent of a house seemed a matter of an open bargain between landlord and tenant. Now we recognize that rents may be driven up by a sudden shortage of house room, beyond what is evidently fair and reasonable. In such cases government may well step in and dictate fair rents, as is being done at the time of this writing in various military centres in Canada. In other words, there is no liberty in a forced market and no justice in forced and accidental gain. Liberty still remains within the framework of the golden rule that no one's liberty must be maintained at the expense of others. But there is a long distance, indeed an open gulf, between this regulation of property in a free state and its obliteration by a despotism.

A similar inference runs through and must run through our whole industrial structure. The particular cases of its application are beyond the scope of the present discussion. Whether this or that particular "new deal" is justifiable is a matter of the special applications of a principle, not of the principle itself. In our day "free competition" cannot possibly mean what it meant in the days of John Stuart Mill. Mass industry has brought with it opportunities for sheer mass to crush out competition by its dead weight and on its wreck to raise up iniquity. "Unfair competition,"<sup>[5]</sup> as recognized and applied by the courts of the United States, covers a multitude of cases of which Adam Smith in his whole twelve years could never dream, which even Mill could only have seen in a sort of nightmare.

Similarly, "monopoly" plays no particular part in Adam Smith's book. Even with Mill monopoly is only the odd case and a monopoly price a thing to be explained and done with as a sort of curiosity. Mill speaks, for example, of the price of a "musical box" in the wilds of Lake Superior. This contrivance, a remote ancestor of the gramophone, was wound up to tinkle little tunes, and presumably a lonely trapper of the North might give anything he had for it, irrespective of what it cost the maker. Mill notices it and passes on. But if he had lived to discuss fifty years later the price of a gramophone in Winnipeg, that would have been different. What with the overhead costs, with joint production, with the fluttering clouds of advertising cost and the bed rock of initial investment, Mill would be greatly put to it to find what his own cherished "cost of production" really was. This thread-guide through his labyrinth would have suddenly branched into a dozen filaments running back into the maze.

But here again, however complicated the circumstances may be, the general idea of liberty under a free government is plain enough. We may have to alter the rules of the game itself. We may force fair trade practices and decent wages through our freely elected Congresses and legislatures and parliaments as in the Fair Labour Standards Act, the Wagner Act, and the Social Security Act, and in the statutes now enforcing fair rents in certain areas of Great Britain. But the individual is still free to pursue his own interests when they are in harmony with the interests of the rest of society.

But yet after all, and with it all, and when all is said about the unforeseen tendencies of democracy, the imperfections of liberty and the shortcomings of popular government left no pause in which to realize how great has been the achievement of liberty and democracy in the last century and a half of history.

We may take first the spread of public education, free or almost so, as perhaps the greatest achievement of modern democracy. In the illiterate, civilized world of two centuries ago—most of it was illiterate—the mass of the people were imprisoned in their own ignorance. To-day, where democracy rules, practically all can read and write, have easy access to books, and enter the enchanted garden of thought and fancy that lies within their pages.

In the English-speaking world Scotland led the way in the public education of its people. Even before the Reformation a Scottish statute (James IV., 1494) required all freeholders of substance to send their heirs to school until they had "perfect Latin." School teachers can estimate how long our boys of to-day would remain at school on these terms. The Reformation carried the written word to the Scottish people. The Church Assembly enjoined the teaching of the "first rudiments" in every parish. An Act of (the Scottish) Parliament (1696) carried this provision into general effect.

Even before this the Puritan colony of Massachusetts had given the English-speaking world a lead with its first compulsory education laws of 1642 and 1648. The system of free, compulsory education spread throughout the United States. The migrating Loyalists carried it to British North America. The "little red school house" took its place among the great, formative institutions of this continent. The latest statistics available show over 20,000,000 children in the public schools of the United States, over 2,000,000 in those of Canada. The chorus of their uplifted voices comes to us in the pauses of our noise and conflict, as an undertone of our civilization.

In England public elementary education was slower in coming. A hundred years ago a large part of the population was still illiterate. We are told on good authority that at the time of the accession of Queen Victoria inertia and class prejudice had long delayed action. The claims of the Established Church blocked the way. Not until the School Act of 1870 was there a general public education carried on by the state. Ample amends have been made. The elementary school population in England stood, before the outbreak of the war, at over 5,000,000.

Nor has the democratic free school limited itself to supplying the "first rudiments." With the care of the mind has gone that of the body, with health clinics and dental clinics; the promotion of recreation; the provision of free school books; in places the provision of school meals. Not all of these things everywhere; but some here and many there, and some day all of them everywhere. For surely here is the starting-point for a better organized world; the children first; what we do in the schools towards general welfare as a general charge, points the way, excites a quicker sympathy.

Public education has not stopped at the elementary school. It carries on to the state university and state schools of graduate education and research. The United States at the present time has an enrolment of over 6,000,000 students in secondary public schools. There are about 700,000 students attending state colleges and universities, matched by nearly as many in private (that is endowed) institutions. But the existence of the great endowed colleges side by side with state universities only represents a useful rivalry, each type able to do things that the other cannot do, and an incentive and opportunity for private wealth to supplement public generosity towards what is, quite rightly, an insatiable demand. The same situation holds in Canada, with state education (provincial universities) covering more of the field. In England the endowed colleges, ancient or recent, still lead, but state secondary schools (just before the war) had some 470,000 pupils as against the 400,000 in the so-called "public" schools not supported by the state. There were, in addition, over 1,300,000 in state vocational schools. In Scotland government secondary schools had 156,000 pupils as against 14,000 in the private schools.

With education has come the public library, democracy's gift of books to its people. In England in the days just before printing, Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, famous as a patron of learning, had a library of some six hundred books—in his day a very treasure house. Given to Oxford, but broken up at the Reformation, Duke Humphrey's library fills a page of history. But to-day in any American or Canadian town any boy or girl with access to the Free Library on Main Street holds treasures vastly greater. Nor let any one interrupt to say that to-day Duke Humphrey's books would be "priceless." They would; so would his bones. I am here counting books as living thought, not as vellum and dust.

Libraries began long before democracy with the cathedral and church libraries of Great Britain—at Canterbury under Augustine in Saxon times. With these were the old lawyers' libraries (that of the Inner Temple, 1540) and those of the colleges of learned societies. The people's libraries owed much to the Mechanics' Institutes of the nineteenth century. A general Act of Parliament for the creation of public libraries was passed in 1850. In colonial America there were private libraries such as that of Cotton Mather in Boston. Benjamin Franklin planned the first subscription library (1731). The oldest real public library (paid for by the people's taxes) was that of the town library of Salisbury, Connecticut, of 1803. But after the middle of the century public libraries increased and multiplied alongside of endowed libraries (the Astor, the Lenox, the Carnegie Libraries) open to the public. Statistics show 6000 public libraries now in the United States and a growing number in Canada.

Take next what is called "Housing," an old word put to a new use to mean supplying decent houses for the industrial classes. One recalls, as already discussed, the aspect of the slums of a hundred years ago, or even those of to-day. The economic basis of the problem is simple enough. Pioneers on the land in a new country can own their own houses by making them. Industrial workers in cities can't, or rather the great mass of them could not, till yesterday. The initial cost was greater than artisan savings could ever overcome. They must take what they could get, and pay for it in rent. Hence

the emergence of landlords' gain, and, still worse, of the unearned increment of rising ground value. Worst of all was the plight of the people without work, or with only casual work, who could buy food and fight starvation, but must take a chance on shelter. Families must crowd into one room. Those who could not sleep above ground must sleep in cellars. And even here, from the foulest bedroom, from the rottenest cellar, landlord's gain must take its toll, ground values exhale from the filthiest slum an unearned increment of fortune, and wealth, often of the wealthiest, draw its luxuries from the misery of the poor. Strange that civilized humanity, for generations past, was too absorbed in needless hates and vain ambitions to have time to burn with indignation at such a sin.

"Housing" is a very simple idea. It means just this; the poorer people can't build their own houses. Very good; we'll build them for them, or if not the whole house, a part of it. Building under cost with the public purse to pay the difference, the public credit and large scale work to cut the cost itself, it's just as simple as that.

Build a house—and here steps in humanitarianism, that warm human quality that dissolves the cold impossibilities of the economist. Build a house—then let every house have sunlight—yes, and a bath—right! and three bedrooms, one for father and mother, one for the boys and one for the girls—good—and a "living-room"—some other place than the kitchen to sit around in—yes, and a "hall" to enter by, don't have them fall in off the street. Then as the neat little house rises to the mind's eye, clean with stucco and half-timber, Tudor style—but better than Tudor ever saw—an angel whispers in the builder's ear, "Wait a minute, what about a bit of a garden?" Set it back ten feet from the street—a little ten-foot garden all ablaze with flowers—have you any notion of the magic of it?

He who cannot enthuse over this is dead indeed. And we could have had it long ago, and can have it still. If we can pay in America and Britain 20 per cent., 30 per cent., 50 per cent, of our incomes to fight iniquity in arms, we could equally well spend it for human welfare in peace. But the odd fact is that we wouldn't need to. It is a hard economic fact that to sweep clean the central slums in the heart of a city, and rebuild dwellings—not single houses, these, but model apartments in tiers with courtyards, enclosed, Spanish style, with the backs turned to the street and their faces to the enclosed sunlit gardens, where the children play—it is a fact, I say, that this would cost economically—what do you think? Nothing. All the labour and time expended would be less than the labour and time saved—in more efficient work and health. And financially it would cost—less than nothing; it would pay.

Public housing, as described, did not begin in Great Britain in earnest till after the Great War, with the Housing Act of 1919. Anything done before that was mainly by private and charitable enterprise, or in the Model Towns of public-spirited companies. The Act of 1919 called on the Local Authorities to plan and build working-class houses and rent them below cost, the central government making good the difference. Under the revised Act of 1923 the government paid a fixed sum (£6 per house per year) and the Local Authorities took the risk of a deficit. Provision was also made for condemning slum areas and demolishing slum houses at the government's expense. Under these acts before the second World War broke out, 3,500,000 new houses were built in England and Wales, an addition of 45 per cent. to those existing. There were demolished 169,000 houses, and a population of 800,000 removed from slums to better homes.

Oddly enough it was perhaps a false start. The cost, national and local, of rehousing the people in towns was at the rate of £127 for each person rehoused. But much cheaper, much healthier it would be to "decentralize" them, factories and all, into the country with ample air and play room. The "housing" part of this would cost only about one-fifth of the town plan (£100 per person); the difference could go to moving the factories. The strange destiny is that the war and the German bombs are decentralizing factory life, and making a new beginning where peace failed.

The question of housing was, very naturally, later in coming to the United States than to Britain.<sup>[6]</sup> Yet even in America the growth of seaports and industrial cities—as especially in New York in the period 1812-62—had brought the problems of slum areas, crowded tenements and epidemic disease. Apart from sanitary measures, water supply, etc., and apart from private action, no general control of housing appears until the New York Tenement House Law of 1867. This was followed by similar legislation in the industrial states containing large cities (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Illinois, etc.) regulating city house building, but mainly of a negative and preventive character, and not giving aid to the building of better houses.

After the Great War housing difficulties became acute both by shortage of houses and by lack of decent accommodation. This led to action by the Federal Government to supplement the operation of state tenement laws and of the many Housing Associations. The Public Works Housing Division carried out a programme of experimental house

building with fifty-two trial projects in twenty-three states. The United States Housing Act of 1937 embodies the first national housing policy. It authorizes the loan of money to state enterprises, up to 90 per cent. of cost.<sup>[7]</sup> By 1940-41, thirty-seven states were co-operating in this plan, and about 190,000 dwellings were provided for and loans made available up to about \$770,000,000.

The present war brought more direct action. Housing became a defence measure. By 1941 about \$290,000,000 had been made available for house-building by the Army, the Navy and the Federal Works Agency.

All this, of course, is just a beginning. The United States Government, once started, will move with giant steps and build with a giant's hand. The old desire, prevalent in the fabulous forties, to "lick all creation," is not yet dead.

But it is not possible to indicate, except with a bare mention, all the vast field of social benefit now covered by democratic government. In addition to the things cited there occur at once the parks and playgrounds, the public (municipal and other) concert halls. Notable is the whole apparatus of public sanitation and public health, as contrasted with the plague and pestilence of pre-democracy days, the jail fevers, the sweeping epidemics, the rotting graveyards where death itself bred death.

Much of course remains to do. We have not yet contrived to give to the people the "bread and work for all" that once seemed the boast of America. Our unstable industry staggers, breaks and falls. The sunshine and shadow of good times and bad sweep over the windswept landscape. Yet we have done enough to know that the rest is some day within our reach. Already, if we look rather at what has been done than at what is still to do, the gain is great. The merest glance at statistics shows us that in the last one hundred years the ordinary hours of labour have been cut by one-third, from twelve to eight per day. Wages, as reckoned in what money will buy, have more than doubled in this period. The wages of the skilled workers, the aristocracy of labour, have passed those enjoyed a hundred years ago as the salaries of the middle class.

This obvious view of the progress of free democracy we did not see in the broad sunshine of what seemed world peace. The defects of the foreground showed too clearly; the meaning of the wider view was lost. Now in the lurid light of threatened destruction we can judge better what was.

All this represents a wonderful record, an advance in social progress to which previous history has no parallel. But we must remember that no code or social legislation, no written law, can of itself guarantee true democracy and preserve liberty. The spring can rise no higher than its source. Democracy must continue to be fed from the altitude of the high ideals that founded it.

Here, then, is the summation of the matter. We had thought, the decent people in all countries, that government by the people under democracy, and with it equal liberty for all, were things definitely achieved. We were forgetting the long struggle and the heroic sacrifice that gave them to the world. Bygone tyrannies and cruelties were forgotten in the nearer perspective of lesser things. Hence came a kind of inertia—a little slumber, a little sleep, a little folding of the hands to sleep—and thereby a creeping paralysis that made us almost let freedom slip from our hands.

Now has come the awakening, and even with all its horror and dismay a new inspiration is born for freedom that will bring it back to the world. But we have learned now that it can never survive on form alone. There is no formula for self-government among bad men. For all things in the world the spirit comes first. Liberty can only serve and survive among people worthy of having it. The soul alone can animate the body.

[1] E. W. Godkin, *Unforeseen Tendencies of Democracy*.

- [2] Oxford Press pamphlets.
- [3] W. Woodward, *George Washington*. 1926.
- [4] A. M. Sokolski, *The Great American Land Bubble*. 1932.
- [5] W. H. S. Stevens, *Unfair Competition*. 1917.
- [6] James Ford (and others), *Slums and Housing*. 1936.
- [7] *Housing Year-Book. National Housing Association Annual*.

### ***By the Same Author***

LITERARY LAPSES  
NONSENSE NOVELS  
SUNSHINE SKETCHES OF A LITTLE TOWN  
BEHIND THE BEYOND  
ARCADIAN ADVENTURES WITH THE IDLE RICH  
MOONBEAMS FROM THE LARGER LUNACY  
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FUNNY PIECES  
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HERE ARE MY LECTURES  
MODEL MEMOIRS  
OUR BRITISH EMPIRE  
TOO MUCH COLLEGE  
MY REMARKABLE UNCLE, AND OTHER SKETCHES

*The Bodley Head*

[End of *Our Heritage of Liberty* by Stephen Leacock]