

SOME POINTS IN THE NEW SOCIAL CREED

As time runs on it becomes more and more obvious that this generation has raised up for itself social problems which it is not competent to solve, and that this inability may easily prove fatal to it. We have been boasting of the achievements of the nineteenth century, and viewing ourselves and our circumstances in an altogether rose-colored medium. We have not had a correct standard for comparing ourselves with our predecessors on earth, nor for judging soberly what we have done or what men can do. We have encouraged ourselves in such demands upon nature or human life that we are ready to declare our civilization a failure because we find that it cannot give us what we have decided that we want. We have so lost our bearings in the conditions of earthly existence that we resent any stringency or limitation as an insult to our humanity, for which somebody ought to be responsible to us. We draw up pronouncements, every paragraph of which begins with: "we demand," without noticing the difference between the things which we can expect from the society in which we live, and those which we must get either from ourselves or from God and nature.

We believe that we can bring about a complete transformation in the economic organization of society, and not have any incidental social and political questions arise which will make us great difficulty, or that, if such questions arise, they can all be succinctly solved by saying: "Let the State attend to it"; "Make a bureau

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and appoint inspectors"; "Pass a law." But the plain fact is that the new time presents manifold and constantly varying facts and factors. It is complicated, heterogeneous, full of activity, so that its phases are constantly changing. Legislation and state action are stiff, rigid, inelastic, incapable of adaptation to cases; they are never adopted except under stress of the perception of some one phase which has, for some reason or other, arrested attention. Hence, the higher the organization of society, the more mischievous legislative regulation is sure to be. Our discussions, therefore, only show how far we are from having a social science adequate to bear its share of human interests by the side of the other sciences on which human welfare now depends, and, also, how great is our peril for lack of a harmonious development on this side.

We think that security and justice are simple and easy things which go without the saying, and need only be recognized to be had and enjoyed; we do not know that security is a thing which men have never yet succeeded in establishing. History is full of instruction for us if we will go to it for instruction; but if we go to it for information, being unable to interpret its lessons or its oracles, we shall get nothing but whims and fads. Now history is one long story of efforts to get some civil organization which could give security over an indefinite period of time. But no such civil organization has yet been found; we are as far from it as ever. The organization itself has eaten up the substance of mankind. The government of a Roman Emperor, a Czar, a Sultan, or a Napoleon, has been only a raid of a lot of hungry sycophants upon the subject mass; the aristocracy of Venice and other city states has been only a plutocratic oligarchy, using the state as a means to its own selfish ends; democ-

racy has never yet been tried enough to know what it will do, but with Jacobinism, communism, and social democracy lying in wait for it on one side, and plutocracy on the other, its promise is not greater than that of the old forms. It remains to be proved that democracy possesses any stability and that it can guarantee rights.

We think that justice is a simple idea, comprehensible by the light of nature, when justice is really one of the most refined and delicate notions which we have to use, and one which requires the most perfect training for its comprehension. We think that it is a thing which we need only demand of our political institutions, in order to get it, when in fact the best institutions ever yet invented owe their greatest glory to the fact that they have succeeded in but remotely approximating to it.

We think that liberty and freedom are matters of metaphysics, and are to be obtained by resolutions about what is true. We are impatient of historical growth and steady improvement. We are irritated because our ideals fail, and we propose to throw away all our birth-right of civil liberty, because a man, even in a free country, cannot have everything that he wants. We are inheritors of civil institutions which it has cost generations of toil and pain to build up, and we are invited to throw them away because they do not fit the social dogmas of some of our prophets.

We think that, if this world does not suit us, it ought to be corrected to our satisfaction, and that, if we see any social phenomenon which does not suit our notions, there should be a remedy found at once. A collection of these complaints and criticisms, however, assembled from the literature of the day, would show the most heterogeneous, contradictory, and fantastic notions.

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We think that this is a world in which we are limited by our wants, not by our powers; by our ideals, not by our antecedents.

We think that we are resisting oppression from other men, when we are railing against the hardships of life on this earth. Inasmuch as we are powerless against nature, we propose to turn and rend each other.

We think that capital comes of itself, and would all be here just the same, no matter what regulations we might make about the custody, use, and enjoyment of it.

We demand a political remedy, when what we want is more productive power, which we must find in ourselves, if anywhere. We want more power over nature, but we think that steam and machinery are our enemies and the cause of all the trouble.

We think that there is such a thing as liberty from the conditions of the struggle for existence, and that we can abolish monopoly, aristocracy, poverty, and other things which do not please our taste.

We think that we can impair the rights of landlords, creditors, employers, and capitalists, and yet maintain all other rights intact.

We think that, although A has greatly improved his position in half a lifetime, that is nothing, because B, in the same time, has become a millionaire.

We throw all our attention on the utterly idle question whether A has done as well as B, when the only question is whether A has done as well as he could.

We think that competition produces great inequalities, but that stealing or alms-giving does not.

We think that there is such a thing as "monopoly"; a simple, plain, definite, and evil thing, which everybody can understand and prescribe remedies for. We believe in the "Banquet of Life" and the "Boon of Nature,"

although nature never utters but one speech to us: "I will yield you a subsistence, if you know how to extort it from me."

We think that we can have an age of steam and electricity, and not put any more brains into the task of life in it than our grandfathers put into living in an age of agricultural simplicity.

We find it a hardship to be prudent and to be forced to think; therefore we think that those who have been prudent for themselves should be forced to be so for others.

We think that we can beget children without care or responsibility, and that our liberty to marry when we choose has nothing to do with our position in the "house of have" or the "house of want."

We started out a century ago with the notion that there are some "rights of man"; we have been trying ever since to formulate a statement of what they are. Although these attempts have been made on purely *a priori* grounds, and without the limitations which would be imposed by an investigation of the facts of our existence on earth, nevertheless they have all failed. So far their outcome is: every man has a right to enjoy; if he fails of it, he has a right to destroy.