

the Evil One ; as if merely to be the director of a public company created a taint in the blood, a modern attainder, which not only incapacitated the unfortunate being from every form of public service, but was, like leprosy, ineradicable when once acquired ; or, again, as if to have been concerned with a speculative undertaking, was, in itself, a crime against society, success in which was a proof of blood-guiltiness, and failure evidence of a yet more criminal folly.

Now, that the present system of public companies is exposed to evil influences, enough and to spare, we should be the last to deny. We hope to touch lightly on some, but by no means all, later on. But this wild unreasoning spirit of vituperation, and indiscriminating mob-law, or press-law, are in many cases cruel to the individual, and defeat their own ends in consequence of their very injustice. Let us therefore take advantage of the present lull to consider calmly what are the elements of the situation, and what is the test by which we may ascertain the rights and the wrongs of the case.

Broadly speaking it may be said that the modern system of public companies, with its corollary the Stock Exchange, constitutes a vast "money market," the particular aspect of money with which it is concerned being the medium for the transfer of capital or power. In the older theory of economics, capital with its opportunity of encouraging one industry, or discouraging another, was regarded as altogether fluid. In fact much of it is not so ; but the present system of public companies gives to such capital as is not fixed the utmost elasticity and mobility of which it is capable. The Stock Exchange is not essential for that purpose ; nor is it the only agency of the kind. In former days the principal agency was the banking fraternity. But under modern conditions of commercial life that is not sufficient ; and to-day, throughout the world, the existence of stock exchanges and public companies enables the small capitalist, according to his means, to select the particular industry or undertaking which he prefers to encourage and from which he desires to derive profit. The system meets in