

PROGRESS AND POVERTY.

leads to some strange conclusions. If, for example, sixty-five millions of people in the United States may say in effect: "There are now as many of us here as can occupy this land with the greatest possible degree of comfort, hence we will admit no more," it is evident that they might have taken the same ground when they were only thirty or twenty, or even ten millions. The logical result is that this whole hemisphere might have been seized and occupied by a few millions of mistakenly selfish people, and the myriads of the Old World left to suffer and perish from the over-population of one half the globe, while denied access to the vast fertile lands lying unused in the other half? Would not the locked-out peoples have had a natural, God-given right to demand admission and to force it, if they could, to a share of the goodly land provided for man as man, and not for a few greedy pre-emptors who had the good fortune to be first on the ground? If this be so, where is the limit to such natural right to be drawn? How many first-comers would have a right to pre-empt the earth and exclude all new comers?

Let us come down for a moment to a more practical view of the question. Is there no way in which the admitted evils of Mongolian immigration can be prevented or minimized, save by the radical method of complete exclusion? Is the "Chinese town," with all its abominations, a necessary result of Chinese immigration? It is one thing to say that a Christian nation has no right to forbid the people with a different, and as they think, lower civilization to set foot on its soil, and another and quite different thing to say that it has no right to require those who come to dwell among them to conform to such sanitary and other regulations as are deemed necessary for the physical and moral health of those among whom they seek new homes. Would it not be possible and practicable for such legislation, national or civic, or both, to be made and enforced, as would compel the Chinese to conform to our ideas in regard to such matters? Why should we not, for instance, prescribe that not more than a certain number should occupy a given space in room, and house, and territory, and that other by-laws, necessary to the health and moral well-being of the communities should be strictly observed? Might not the labour problem be settled in a large measure by such legislation? Compelled to live in a style more nearly resembling that of white labourers, they could no longer afford to underbid them, as they are now able to do by reason of their cheaper habits of life.

A good woman is the loveliest flower that blooms under heaven; and we look with love and wonder upon its silent grace, its pure fragrance, its delicate bloom of beauty.—*Thackeray.*

In the discussion of the economic problems which occupy so large a place among the burning questions of the day, no statement is more common, or, we venture to say, more generally believed, especially by the masses who regard themselves as in some sense the victims of unjust industrial conditions, than that the tendency of those conditions is to widen the gulf between the rich and the poor. Few, perhaps, would go so far as to say with Henry George: "All the increased wealth which modern progress brings goes but to build up great fortunes, to increase luxury, and make sharper the contrast between the house of Have and the house of Want," but the general impression certainly is, unless we greatly mistake the prevailing sentiment, that the tendency of our industrial system is towards the concentration of great riches in the hands of a few and the decrease of the numbers and comparative influence of the moderately wealthy. Certainly there is much in what passes under the eye of the ordinary observer, at least in this country and in the United States, to favor this view. On every hand we see the smaller industrial establishments swallowed up by the larger. Many of us can remember a time when every town and village had its small manufacturing of various kinds, content to supply the wants of the surrounding country, within a moderate radius. At that time, too, the business of distribution was shared by many comparatively small establishments, each with its own circle of patrons, and each as a rule doing a business too small to foster expectations of great wealth, but large enough to insure a moderate competence for the frugal and skilful merchant. Now, and for some time past, on the other hand, we have been accustomed to see and hear of the absorption of several small establishments into one larger one, the removal of this to some large town or city, and the ultimate consolidation of the bulk of almost all the manufacturing in a particular line into one or more great combines, whose proprietors, by means of the superior facilities afforded by command of large capital, were enabled to crush out all competition on a small scale. So, too, one now finds in every large city great commercial emporiums, supplying to their crowds of customers goods of almost every conceivable description to meet the wants of the individual and the household, and but a little enquiry is needed to find that these vast depots of supply are built upon the ruin of many smaller businesses, whose former proprietors have been forced to give up the unequal contest and in many cases are glad to enter the service of the victors.

We are not now expressing an opinion upon the social or moral bearing of these great movements for the concentration of industries and of capital in fewer hands. It cannot be denied that the advantages re-

sulting from minute subdivision of labour, and saving of expense, are very great. We merely mention these facts of observation as samples of many indications which have given rise to the impression of which we speak. And many of us have been accustomed to believe that the dark dens and tenement houses in great cities, the abomination of the "sweating system," and what we have believed to be the increasing multitudes of the unemployed owing to the growing fierceness of competition for situations, by which the older and feebler are crowded to the wall, with all the untold privations and miseries which are the result in many once comfortable homes, were undoubted facts pointing in the same direction.

Those who have thus been accustomed to accept the impression that the rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer, as an admitted and incontrovertible fact, will be prepared to read with a good deal of surprise and perhaps with some incredulity, an article which Mr. W. H. Mallock, the well-known English thinker and essayist, contributes to the current number of the *North American Review*, under the title, "The Significance of Modern Poverty." Mr. Mallock sets out with a direct denial that the facts are in accord with the general belief as above stated. With regard to America he does not claim to be qualified to speak with sufficiently precise knowledge, but as to the chief countries of Europe, and England in particular, he maintains that it may be said with the utmost confidence, "a confidence derived from the most authoritative and various information," that the belief to which we have referred and which he justly describes as holding a foremost place in the teachings of all socialists, "is altogether wrong; that it is not only not the truth, but an absolute inversion of the truth."

"In England," he says, "the average fortunes of the rich are distinctly, even if not greatly decreasing; persons with moderate fortunes of from £150 to £1,000 a year, are increasing faster than any other class; whilst, so far as concerns the increase of the individual income, the average increase has been among the labouring and wage-earning masses. Mr. Giffen, for instance, the Statistical Secretary to the Board of Trade, to whom English socialists, whenever it may suit their purpose, are accustomed to appeal as the greatest living authority, has declared that so far as 'the individual income' is concerned, 'it would not be far short of the mark to say that the whole of the great material improvement of the past fifty years has gone to the masses.' And whatever test we apply, the same conclusion is forced on us. The masses not only receive as a whole larger incomes, but their incomes procure them more comforts and luxuries; they inhabit better houses, wear better clothes; they consume per head an increasing quantity of bread, meat, butter, tea, sugar, and tobacco; and, as the last census shows, the number of persons, such as clowns, jugglers, singers, and the humbler class of actors, who minister exclusively to the amusement of the poorer classes, has