

The fancies of Rousseau and Bernardin de St. Pierre heralded the Revolution. Rousseau's reveries, be it observed, not only failed of realization, but gave hardly any sign of that which was really coming. The Jacobins canted in his phrase, but they returned to the state, of nature only in personal filthiness, in brutality of manners, and in guillotining Lavoisier, because the Republic had no need of chemists.

There is a general feeling abroad that the stream is drawing near a cataract now, and there are apparent grounds for the surmise. There is everywhere in the social frame an outward unrest, which as usual is the sign of fundamental change within. Old creeds have given way. The masses, the artisans especially, have ceased to believe that the existing order of society, with its grades of rank and wealth, is a divine ordinance against which it is vain to rebel. They have ceased to believe in a future state, the compensation of those whose lot is hard here. Convinced that this world is all, and that there is nothing more to come, they want at once to grasp their share of enjoyment. The labor journals are full of this thought. Social science, if it is to take the place of religion as a conservative force, has not yet developed itself or taken firm hold of the popular mind. The rivalry of factions and demagogues has almost everywhere introduced universal suffrage. The poorer classes are freshly possessed of political power, and have conceived boundless notions of the changes which, by exercising it, they may make in their own favor. They are just in that twilight of education in which chimeras stalk. This concurrence of social and economical with political and religious revolution has always been fraught with danger. The governing classes, unnerved by skepticism, have lost faith in the order which they represent, and are inclined to precipitate abdication. Many members of them—partly from philanthropy, partly from vanity, partly perhaps from fear—are playing the demagogue and, as they did in France, dallying with revolution. The ostentation of wealth has stimulated to a dangerous pitch envy, which has always been one of the most powerful elements of revolution. This is not the place to cast the horoscope of society. We may, after all, be exaggerating the gravity of the crisis. The first of May passed without bringing