

contrary, leads not only to the largest production of wealth, but to the fairest distribution. It is the easy and obvious way of bringing about that change by which alone justice in distribution can be secured, and the great inventions and discoveries which the human mind is now grasping can be converted into agencies for the elevation of society from its very foundations.

This was seen with the utmost clearness by that knot of great Frenchmen who, in the last century, first raised the standard of free trade. What they proposed was not the mere substitution of a revenue tariff for a protective tariff, but the total abolition of all taxes, direct and indirect, save a single tax upon the value of land—the *impôt unique*. They realized that this unification of taxation meant not merely the removal from commerce and industry of the burdens placed upon them, but that it also meant the complete reconstruction of society—the restoration to all men of their natural and equal rights to the use of the earth. It was because they realized this, that they spoke of it in terms that applied to any mere fiscal change, however beneficial, would seem wildly extravagant, likening it, in its importance to mankind, to those primary inventions which made the first advances in civilization possible—the use of money and the adoption of written characters.

And whoever will consider how far-reaching are the benefits that would result to mankind from a measure which, removing all restrictions from the production of wealth, would also secure equitable distribution, will see that these great Frenchmen were not extravagant.

True free trade would emancipate labor.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LION IN THE WAY.

We may now see why the advocacy of free trade has been so halting and half-hearted.

It is because the free trade principle carried to its logical conclusion would destroy that monopoly of nature's bounty which enables those who do no work to live in luxury at the expense of "the poor people who have to work," that so-called free traders have not ventured to ask even the abolition of tariffs, but have endeavored to confine the free-trade principle to the mere abolition of protective duties. To go further would be to meet the lion of "vested interests."

In Great Britain the ideas of Quesnay and Turgot found a soil in which, at the time, they could only grow in stunted form. The power of the landed aristocracy was only beginning to find something of a counterpoise in the growth of the power of capital, and in politics, as in literature, Labor had no voice. Adam Smith belonged to that class of men-of-letters always disposed by strong motives to view things which the dominant class deem essential in the same light as they do, and who before the diffusion of education and the cheapening of books could have had no chance of being heard on any other terms. Under the shadow of an absolute despotism more liberty of thought and expression may sometimes be enjoyed than where power is more diffused, and forty years ago it would doubtless have been safer to express in Russia opinions adverse to serfdom than in South Carolina to have questioned slavery. And so, while Quesnay, the favorite physician of the master of France, could in the palace of Versailles carry his free trade propositions to the legitimate conclusion of the *impôt unique*, Adam Smith, had he been so radical, could hardly have got the leisure to write the *Wealth of Nations* or the means to print it.

I am not criticising Adam Smith, but pointing out conditions which have affected the development of an idea. The task which Adam Smith undertook—that of showing the absurdity and impolicy of protective tariffs—was in his time and place a sufficiently difficult one, and even if he saw how much further than this the principles he enunciated really led, the prudence of the man who wishes to do what may be done in his day and generation, confident that where he lays the foundation others will in due time rear the edifice, might have prompted him to avoid carrying them further.

However this may be, it is evidently because free trade

really goes so far, that British free traders, so-called, have been satisfied with the abolition of protection, and, abbreviating the motto of Quesnay, "Clear the ways and let things alone," into "Let things alone," have shorn off its more important half. For one step further—the advocacy of the abolition of revenue tariffs, as well as of protective tariffs—would have brought them upon dangerous ground. It is not only, as English writers intimate to excuse the retaining of a revenue tariff, that direct taxation could not be resorted to without arousing the British people to ask themselves why they should continue to support the descendants of royal favorites, and to pay interest on the vast sums spent during former generations in worse than useless wars; but it is that direct taxation could not be advocated without danger to even more important "vested interests." One step beyond the abolition of protective duties, and the British free-trade movement must have come full against that fetich which for some generations the British people have been taught to reverence as the very Ark of the Covenant—private property in land.

For in the British kingdoms (save in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands) private property in land was not instituted in the short and easy way in which Will Atkins endeavored to institute it on Crusoe's island. It has been the gradual result of a long series of usurpations and expropriations. In the view of British law these are usurpations, but one owner of British soil, the Crown—that is to say, the British people. The individual landholders are still in constitutional theory what they once were in actual fact—mere tenants. The process by which they have become virtual owners has been that of throwing upon indirect taxation the rents and taxes they were once held to pay in return for their lands, while they have added to their domains by fencing in the commons, in much the same manner as some of the same class have recently fenced in large tracts of our own public domain.

The entire abolition of the British tariff would involve as a necessary consequence the abolition of the greater part of the internal indirect taxation, and would thus compel heavy direct taxation, which would fall not upon consumption but upon possession. The moment this became necessary, the question of what share should be borne by the holders of land must inevitably arise in such a way as to open the whole question of the rightful ownership of British soil. For not only do all economic considerations point to a tax on land values as the proper source of public revenues; but so do all British traditions. A land tax of four shillings in the pound of rental value is still nominally enforced in England, but being levied on a valuation made in the reign of William III., it amounts in reality to not much over a penny in the pound. With the abolition of indirect taxation this is the tax to which men would naturally turn. The resistance of landholders would bring up the question of title, and thus any movement which went so far as to propose the substitution of direct for indirect taxation must inevitably end in a demand for the restoration to the British people of their birthright.

This is the reason why in Great Britain the free-trade principle was aborted into that spurious thing "British free trade," which calls a sudden halt to its own principles, and after demonstrating the injustice and impolicy of all tariffs, proceeds to treat tariffs for revenue as something that must of necessity exist.

In assigning these reasons for the failure to carry the free-trade movement further than the abolition of protection, I do not, of course, mean to say that such reasons have consciously swayed free traders. I am definitely pointing out what by them has been in many cases doubtless only vaguely felt. We imbibe the sympathies, prejudices and antipathies of the circle in which we move, rather than acquire them by any process of reasoning. And the prominent advocates of free trade, the men who have been in a position to lead and educate public opinion, have belonged to the class in which the feelings I speak of hold sway—for that is the class of education and leisure.

In a society where unjust division of wealth gives the fruits of labor to those who do not labor, the classes who control the organs of public education and opinion—the classes to whom the many are accustomed to look for light and leading, must be loath to challenge the primary wrong, whatever it may be. This is inevitable, from the fact that the class of wealth and leisure, and consequently of culture and influence, must be, not the class which loses by the unjust distribution of wealth but the class which (at least relatively) gains by it.

Wealth means power and "respectability," while poverty means weakness and disrepute. So in such a society the class that leads and is looked up to, while it may be willing to tolerate vague generalities and impracticable proposals, must frown on any attempt to trace social evils to their real cause, since that is the cause that