

The Mission of Capitalism.

The capitalist class had humble enough beginnings. Its progenitors were the bourgeois, literally townsmen, of the middle ages. A part of the feudal society, they were yet, in a way, apart from it. They were neither nobles nor serfs, but a species of lackeys to the nobility. From them the noble obtained his clothing and the gay trappings of his horse. They forged his weapons and his armour, built his castles, loaned him money. He stood to them in the relation of a consumer and as a consumer he legislated, defining their markets, prohibiting them from enhancing prices, enacting that wages should not exceed certain figures, insisting that goods should be of such and such a quality and texture and be sold at certain fixed prices.

Naturally these restrictions were little to the taste of the bourgeoisie. As trade and commerce increased they found these conditions less and less tolerable. As they grew in wealth and influence they became less and less inclined to tolerate them. In England they had joined with the nobles to weaken the king and with the king to weaken the nobles. Finally they broke the power of both. In the name of freedom they crushed feudalism. But the freedom they sought was a freedom that would permit them to adulterate goods, that would allow the workers to leave the land and move where the factories needed them, their wives, and their children.

While in other lands the course of the bourgeois revolution was somewhat different than in England, the result was the same. In France, for instance, the revolution was pent up for so long a period that when it burst forth it deluged the land in blood through which the people waded, bearing banners inscribed "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," to a new order wherein Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, were the last things possible.

Once freed from the fetters of feudalism the onward march of capitalism became a mad, headlong rush. Everywhere mills, factories and furnaces sprang up. Their smoke and fumes turned fields once fertile and populous into desolate, uninhabitable wastes. Their refuse poisoned and polluted the rivers until they stank to Heaven. Earth's bowels were riven for her mineral hoards. Green flourishing forests became mere acres of charred and hideous stumps. Commerce pierced all mountains, fathomed all seas, explored all lands, disturbing the age-long sleep of hermit peoples that they might buy her wares. Capital spread its tentacles over all the world. Everywhere its voice was heard, crying "Work, work, work" to the workers, "Buy, buy, buy," to all the peoples.