

still predominant and were commonly supposed to have a scientific consistency and truth against which only wilfulness could rebel. Yet there was this curious inconsistency in them—that, while they recommended a certain course of action to society which it was to adopt of its own free will, they promised as the mechanical result of that action a state of moral and material well-being to which society would attain without further effort. The will was to make its choice at the start; and then no further choice would be required of it. But this inconsistency was also based upon certain assumptions that do not now seem to us beyond dispute. It was assumed, for instance, that the main end of every society was to become rich; and that it would become rich if individuals were allowed to acquire riches by any means they chose to employ. This licence was called freedom; and indeed it meant a complete freedom for those who were rich already, but a freedom merely nominal and legal for those who were poor. They were free to be rich if they could; but the great mass of them could not, and remained in extreme poverty, in spite or rather because of the riches of the few. Thus the national well-being promised