

The Standard of Living

In Two Parts.

Part I.

THE standard of living is a social standard of life, determined by the material conditions of any given society, at any given time. If those conditions alter, obviously there must be change in the living standards and, conversely, normal changes in the living standards indicate advancement in the technique of production. And in time that advance of the new standard will be correlated.

Because of these material conditions, living standards differ from country to country, and at different times in the same country. The individual handicrafts and self-sufficing production of feudalism brought the life standard to correspondence with feudal economy. Its standard was simple, its wealth distribution comparatively proportionate, because its tools were simple, its methods crude, and its demands on human energy the natural activity of rustic labor.

But with the development of the machine age, the exacting vigilance of moving machinery, minute social divisions of labor efficiency, its nerve racking tension and exhaustion of effort, transformed the crude life standard of agricultural economy into the necessarily higher grade of capitalist technology. High power energy demands high power physique and from its necessities has capital evolved their satisfaction. Compared with preceding societies, the modern standard of life is immensely advanced. At no period of world history, has society been dowered so superabundantly with wealth, luxury, comfort, wellbeing: all that can make work an art, life a delight and man free.

But capital means wage labor. The private ownership of the social means of life involves the enslavement of the dispossessed. And the slave must work on the terms of his master, i. e., wage-labor commodity production (for profit). The more anticipated profit—the more production—the more labor. The more labor, the greater accumulation of capital. For labor can only reproduce its subsistence by increasing capital. Therefore the greater the development of capitalist production, the greater the enslavement of labor. The greater the accumulation of capital, the deeper the poverty of labor, the greater the inequality of wealth. But the more

developed the capacity of the capitalist powers of production and the more disproportionate the wealth distribution becomes, so in the same proportion the living standard of capitalist society declines.

A standard of living is a gauge of life condition, a social measurement of the factual division and enjoyment of social production. Life is the full benefit of the whole social creations—or it is slavery. Life condition is measured by social status, by comparison with the social attainments of the movement. A candle is a first class illuminant till society introduces electricity; walking a charming method of locomotion until the auto and railroad arrive. Any old order of things suffices until new developments arise, and in relation as society approximates the new condition is its living status determined. Social modifications increase social capacities; increased means of wellbeing elevates the standard of life and that standard has fallen for any portion of society unable to command the new condition and opportunity.

Measured with such a scale, whenever the capitalist method of production fails to absorb the social powers it has developed, the social status, the life condition of society, declines. And at a more rapid rate as commercial expansion fails. Under the terms of capital, ownership of the means of life gives to that ownership the total wealth of production and to the producers their efficiency cost of reproduction. Social machinery lessens the value of available social labor, and furthers the inequality of wealth divisions. The subsistence of labor entails the creation of fresh capital, thereby increasing the power of capital over labor, i. e., augmenting the intensity of exploitation. For these reasons, the actual life condition of the proletariat steadily declines.

By the abolition of political society, and production for profits, for communist cooperation and production for use, the standard of life would be immensely exalted, because it would apply with single scope over a free society of community producers. The resources of society would be conserved, its powers and potentialities developed to capacity, its noblest ideals and aspirations mustered to completest fruition. That is the standard of living that socialism offers to humanity.

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braved his dreaded enemy in order to save the life of his keeper, or from that old baboon, who descending from the mountains, carried away in triumph his young comrade from a crowd of astonished dogs—as from a savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practises infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions."

There you have Darwin's comparison of men and monkeys. He also gives us an idea of how much he worried about his own descent. And yet, we know that we are descended from such savages and barbarians. And the joke—perhaps it would be better to say the tragedy, of the matter is, that we do not have to go back into ancient history to find savages and barbarians of this type. We do not even have to leave this glorious and enlightened land of North America to find "savages" who are haunted by the grossest superstitions, and they are not the aborigines by any means. Nor do we have to go to the islands of Borneo and Papua, or to the jungles of darkest Africa to find "savages" who delight to torture and murder anybody who differs with them in opinion. And this is the type of humans who consider themselves humiliated and disgraced by the theory that they are closely related to the monkeys. I mentioned before that the more a man resembles a monkey the more he resented the idea that he was related to the monkeys. I take that back, it is a slander on the monkeys. There is very little resemblance between men and monkeys when it comes to blood-thirstiness and superstition.

Now about that old yarn which has been going the rounds for the last sixty years or so, to the effect that Darwin said men were descended from monkeys. The popularity of the yarn itself is proof that men are not descended from monkeys. No animal descended from a monkey could possibly be stupid enough to interpret Darwinism in any such a manner. Neither Darwin nor anybody else with any intelligence ever said anything of the kind. What Darwin did say was that men and monkeys were evidently descended from a common ancestor, from some animal that was neither a man nor a monkey, but was the progenitor of both. Of course it is unreasonable to expect the average opponent of Darwinism to understand anything like that. To do so he would have to understand Darwin's theory of the cause of organic evolution, and the "origin of species," which was Darwin's great discovery. And such an effort is entirely beyond his limited intelligence. The question of the "descent of man", or the relationship of men and monkeys, is merely a side issue. Anybody with ordinary intelligence can see by Darwin's own words in the passage I have quoted, that he never even thought of saying that men were descended from monkeys. He tells us that he would "as soon" be descended from a monkey as from a savage, and explains why. His aim, evidently, was to show that the human animal has no cause to consider himself disgraced by his relationship with the monkeys.

But let us get back to Willie Bryan and his tooth. In spite of everything that has been said about Willie and his opposition to Darwinism, he has perhaps done more to popularize Darwin's theory of evolution than any other man in the United States in the last twenty years. Before Willie started out on his rampage, there were millions of people who had never even heard of Darwinism. Others, who may have heard of it but did not know whether it was the name of a prominent movie star, or a new brand of jackass brandy. When Willie went on the war path they began to ask questions such as: "Where is Darwin's still located anyhow?" Or: "Where did Darwin ever tend bar?" At the present time, however, almost everybody who reads a newspaper knows that Darwinism has something to do with the relationship of men and monkeys. And that is about all that Willie can teach them on the subject. But even that is a step in the right direction.

There is another thing that must be said in Willie's favor that cannot be said about a great
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Is It a Fossil Tooth?

THE finding of a fossil tooth thought to be that of an intermediate between ape and man, in the home state of William Jennings Bryan, principal opponent of the facts of evolution, started a search for further evidence of the animal."

The paragraph quoted above is taken from "Science", Jan. 12th 1923. "Science" is a weekly journal devoted to the advancement of science, published in New York City.

Now I don't like to discourage the scientists, but I am skeptical about that tooth. We must not allow the scientists to bluff us into "believing" that their "pernicious doctrine" of organic evolution can be proved by any such subterfuge. I am convinced that Willie Bryan lost that tooth himself. It may look like the tooth of a man-like ape or an ape-like man. No matter. It is Willie's own tooth. It was found in Willie's own state.

No doubt the scientists will argue that Willie is a modern man, and that the tooth is a monkey-like tooth apparently of a past age, and therefore, although the tooth might belong to one of Willie's ancestors, it could not possibly belong to Willie. But such an argument is futile because, if Willie just had a tail he would be a perfectly good monkey him-

self right now, never mind his ancestors. Furthermore, Willie tells us that if we had the patriotic satisfaction of knowing that we were descended from American monkeys it would not be so bad, but according to Darwin's theory we are descended from foreign monkeys, or Asiatic monkeys, perhaps, even from Bolshevik monkeys. Is it not horrible to think that Willie Bryan, and Nikolai Lenin, may have descended from the same monkey?

Speaking of Willie Bryan's monkey-like characteristics, it is a peculiar psychological fact that the more a man resembles a monkey intellectually, the more furiously he resents the theory that he is closely related to the monkeys biologically. On the other hand, the scientists and philosophers do not seem to consider it any humiliation or disgrace to know that they are closely related to the mammalia in general, and to the monkeys in particular. Let us see what Darwin himself, the man who is supposed to be responsible for most of this "monkey business," has to say on this point.

"He who has seen a savage in his native land will not feel much shame, if forced to acknowledge that the blood of some more humble creature flows in his veins. For my own part I would as soon be descended from that heroic little monkey, who