

THE NEW FEUDALISM

HOW IT COMPARES WITH THAT OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

Some Drawbacks to Progress—How the People of the United States Are Being Reduced to Vassalage—What the End Will Be.

The following appeared as the leading article in a recent issue of The United States Investor and Promoter of American Enterprises. It bears evidence of careful preparation and the desire of the writer to rather understate than exaggerate the situation. The source of the opinions expressed makes them peculiarly interesting.

It requires almost more temerity than we possess to assert that what is termed progress is more seeming than real. The world abandons one method and adopts another whereby it accomplishes certain results more expeditiously, more economically and in vastly increased measure, and we call this progress. But progress, on a final analysis, is comparable to the Irishman's sheet, which was lengthened at one end by a piece cut from the other end. This is seen to be true even in the case of a people that have been unmistakably advanced in civilization. No one will deny that when the Hawaiians were led to give up their primitive barbarism there was an instance of progress. But the change has made the Hawaiians an effete race, whose fate is soon to perish from off the face of the earth. The American Indians are another instance of a people who lose more than they gain by progress.

Where progress has gained the greatest victories it has had to pay heavily for them—pyrrhic victories they might almost be called. The labor saving inventions and discoveries of the last century are a great improvement, but they have brought with them the factory system, whereby the souls and bodies of a large portion of the race are being stunted, and they have defaced the fair face of nature, and they have done their best—though not as yet with entire success—to drive the nine muses into retirement. The building of great cities has added greatly to the comfort and convenience of life, but it has given birth to nervous prostration, a disease of which our fathers knew nothing. The rapid multiplication of books and the lessening cost of the same enables every one to possess a library, but as a consequence the reading habit is practically dead. Great progress has been made in the culinary art, but people cannot eat as much as formerly, and do not get nearly so much satisfaction from what they eat.

These are a few random illustrations of the fact that there is never a gain without a loss. This appears to be a law of nature, and it would of course be foolish to turn the wheel of progress because it has its drawbacks. Nevertheless it is always wise before taking a step in the direction of the so called progress to weigh the consequences. Civilization does not tend in a straight line. Though it would not be correct to say that its course is that of a circle, it is nearer that than a continuous onward march. The present is one of those times when it is obvious that it is turning back on itself. During the last half (and especially the last quarter) of the eighteenth century, great forces were at work for the unloosening of the shackles in which a large portion of the human race were groaning. The philosophy and literature of that period tended to open the eyes of man to his inalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and the outcome was such outbursts as the Declaration of Independence in this country and the Revolution of 1789 in France. Those events marked the downfall of feudalism and the beginning of a long period of broadening liberty. It is singular that just about a century later should be witnessed the indications of a gradual return to a state of affairs comparable to the old grinding condition of the eighteenth century. This may be a startling assertion, but the fact is obvious to one who is not willfully blind.

In the first place, is it not apparent that political liberty is in danger of being lost? Autocratic power is growing fast in the United States, however it may be elsewhere. Two centuries and a half ago Charles I lost his head because of his attempt to rule England without a parliament. But Charles' tyranny was not more audacious than that of Platt and Quay. The American boss possesses a power which no autocrat since the days of Peter the Great ever wielded. He does what few tyrants have actually succeeded in doing—he makes the people whom he rules bow down and kiss the hand that wields the rod. The people of the United States go deliberately to the polls and elect parliaments (so to speak) whose only duty it shall be to register the will of the boss. And the worst of the matter is, that the boss is generally, in his personal characteristic, a blackguard. It is an incontrovertible fact that bossism is an increasing factor in this country, and this can denote but one thing—namely, that the people are rapidly forgetting how to safeguard their liberties.

Another indication that history is proceeding on a revolving axis is the growth of social distinctions. The boast of American civilization in the past has been that it tended to equalize social conditions. That was true during a very considerable part of our history. But it is no longer true. In no part of the world are class distinctions more clearly recognized than they are getting to be here. Our enormous family fortunes are rapidly differentiating a portion of the people from the great bulk of the population. The distinction between the cloven and the masses is becoming very sharp. Ostentatious display of wealth has become one of the most distressing features of American civilization (though that expression is

a misnomer), and has done much to earn for us the contempt of the entire world.

This brings us to a third factor and the one which really constitutes the point of this article. We refer to the growth of a new feudalism. We use this expression advisedly. Under the old regime feudalism was that system whereby the holding of estates was dependent upon rendering military service to a superior. The form of the old feudalism may be in no danger of being revived. But the spirit of the new feudalism is identical with that of the old. The barons of a former day possessed themselves of all the available land and allowed their inferiors a living upon it in return for service. The feudal lord was the dominating factor in the life of every man, woman and child in former times. He had an inalienable right to life and happiness; they existed on sufferance.

The feudal lord of today is not intent upon war. It is not by ownership of the soil that he exacts the services of his fellows. He is the same rapacious personage that he formerly was, but he has changed his complexion somewhat. He is now a lord of trade. He is gradually working the industries of the world out of the hands of the many into his own, and the many bid fair, other things being equal, to fall into a relationship with him similar to that in which the vassal of old stood to his feudal chief.

It is interesting to note the close analogy between the process that is now going on and that by means of which the old feudal barons obtained their position. In the former times a baron enlarged his possessions of the land in three ways. He seized the estates of others; he had estates conferred upon him by the king, and he allowed small holders to vest the ownership of their estates in him in return for promised protection. The new feudal lords seek not, primarily, to monopolize the land, but the industries that flourish on it. The policy of seizure is familiar to them. They are without scruple when the opportunity presents itself to crush out a competitor. As illustrative of his spirit we have the traditional policy of the Standard Oil trust in ruining any refiner of oil, no matter how small, who remains in business after the trust tells him to get out; also the policy of the sugar trust in coercing the grocers (by threats) from purchasing from other refiners.

We have no king in this country who can placate his barons by conferring estates upon them (generally seized from some of his other subjects). But we have a congress which can and does pass laws conferring special privileges. Thus, for instance, we see the sugar trust perpetuating its existence by obtaining legislation from congress that enables it to fasten a monopoly upon the people. It is a fact which no one will dispute that the present trust movement would never have been thought of were it not that the laws of the land are, as a body, favorable to the creation and maintenance of monopolies.

In old days, small proprietors vested their estates in the great barons on the promise of protection. This they did as the least of many evils. The small manufacturer or tradesman today is impelled to purrue a similar course. He prefers independence, but independence seems no longer possible. He is the prey of many, and all more powerful than himself. He therefore seeks a protector. He turns his business over to a trust or a department store and accepts a salaried position in the same.

What will the end be? The answer is easy. The new feudalism will in time break down, just as the old did. The old feudal barons became very powerful; they menaced kings and kept the life of their day in a condition of turmoil; they became a pest and were eventually wiped out of existence, in some cases by a gradual process of events and in one case, that of the French revolution, by most awful bloodshed. These are softer days; the growth of civilization and the increase of luxury have taken some of the iron out of our blood and it might seem rash to predict a resort to such stern measures as used to be applied. Still it is well to remember that the people never forget that they possess the power of revolution.

Our object in saying all this is purely to put our readers on their guard. Conditions as they exist today possess none of the elements of permanency. Ignoring now the political and social sides of the situation, it is clear that any one who builds his hope upon the present industrial feudalism is likely to come to grief. The feudal barons of today are not a permanent feature of the situation, and their monopolies will endure but for a time. Economic law will effect their ruin, and it is possible that the people of the United States may eventually recover enough of their political power to aid in the demolition by means of repressive legislation. But if we should be mistaken, and neither of these agencies be effective in producing this result then—we need not hesitate to make the prediction—the people will exercise that power which they hold as a last resort. We mean the power of revolution.

State Railways. Rev. J. C. Kirby of Fort Adelaide, Australia, writes as follows: We are not entered by great corporations in the way you seem to be. Our railways are allowed by the state, and all employees are state officials. The hours are fixed by regulations, and so are the pay, etc., which are under the control of the responsible ministry, which is dependent for existence upon the continual possession of a majority in the lower house of parliament; hence things are kept pretty straight, and the men do not work the excessive number of hours they do in the States, and the railways cannot give unjust preferences. Our telegraphs and telephones are also state possessions and services.

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It produces cash every time.

It does not have to wait for the market to advance.

It is not subject to speculations of the bulls and bears on the board of trade.

It is a load that galls and frets and chafes.

It is a burden that the farmer cannot shake off.

It is with him morning, noon and night.

It eats with him at the table.

It gets under his pillow when he sleeps.

It rides upon his shoulder during the day.

It consumes his grain crop.

It devours his cattle.

It selects the finest horses and the fattest steers.

It lives upon the first fruit of the season.

It stalks into the dairy where the busy housewife toils day after day and month after month and takes the nicest cheese and the choicest butter.

It shares the children's bread and robs them of half their clothes.

It stoops the toiler's back with its remorseless burden of care. It hardens his hands, numbs his intellect, prematurely whitens his locks, and oftentimes sends him and his aged wife over the hill to the poorhouse.

It is the inexorable and exacting taskmaster.

Its whip is as merciless and cruel as the lash of the slave driver.

It is a menace to liberty, a hindrance to progress, a curse to the world.—S. F. Norton.

HOW THEY DO IT.

The Rules That Govern the Operations of the Trust Builder.

It is said of the president of the Standard Oil trust, and he has many imitators, that he never issues a positive order, says Ainslee's Magazine. He merely "suggests." The burden of making a suggestion operative is left to the official to whom it is made, and although suggestions are usually acted upon as promptly as the commands of the sultan when he uses a regiment of Janissaries to carry his message, they are approved of only when they are successful. If by any chance a suggestion should prove a failure when applied, the unfortunate who acted upon it must bear the blame for not having had better judgment, and the result is invariable. The trust builder, like Tallyrand, "does not like to have unsuccessful men about him." On the other hand, if a suggestion is rejected and the result shows that the judgment of the official was good, the great man conveniently forgets that he was ever guilty of making such a suggestion. Success excuses everything, and in constantly thriving for it the darkest tragedies of trust building are brought about. Every year men go mad trying to keep pace with the terrific advances of the trust builders, just as the generals of Napoleon succumbed in attempting to work out the world grasping designs of the insatiable and tireless commander. The great trust builders deserve to be credited with private asylums just as the western desperadoes are credited with private graveyards.

The beauty of the trust system of organization is that, while exacting obedience, it leaves room for individual judgment, and in this way secures intelligent co-operation. And when the trust builders find a man who is capable of serving them intelligently they are not niggardly in their rewards. Promotions come quickly when deserved, and a man gets a chance to do all the work he has the capacity for as long as he can show successful results. It is this system that has enabled the Standard Oil company to conquer commercially a territory vaster than that of Napoleon or of Caesar. Truly, the Standard Oil is the father of the trusts, and though others have achieved much, they bear the same relations to it that the children of a great man do to their father; they may be successful, but they are overshadowed.

Nebbraska's Opportunity. In a speech at the banquet of the Peter Cooper Populist club, in Omaha, Governor Poynter said: "Is the principle of monetary reform less vital now than in 1892? Do we disagree upon the necessity for the control of corporations, trusts and monopolies? What one of the great principles we have been advocating since 1892 are we now ready to abandon? Not one! My friends, if we allow narrow minded bickerings and strife to divide the friends of reform along the lines of the great principles for which Nebraska has stood firm since 1892, and her example helps to disintegrate the grand army which is now gathering for the great conflict of 1900, we will, to say the least of it, countenance that which would be little less than a political crime. If not a crime, it would at least be a monumental political folly."

Reverting to the Omaha platform, he said it contained the first utterance of a national convention demanding unrestricted silver coinage at the ratio of 16 to 1.

THE MORTGAGE.

What is Needed.

While in the main agreeing with all The Beacon Light says under the article, "No New Parties," we wish to say that we have the utmost confidence in the sincerity of the Populists who brought about the Cincinnati call and proposed the names of Barker and Donnelly for presidential candidates. We know most of them personally and believe their motives to be good and pure. We have not so far been able to concur in their judgment. We see no need of a new party for Populists. If they cannot find what they want in the People's Party, then the organization of a new party is useless. What the People's Party needs is reorganization, activity and a move forward all along the line and all side shows abolished.—Winter-set (La.) Review.

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NOTICE.

In the District Court of Lancaster County, Nebraska, Third Judicial District. The State of Nebraska, Lancaster County, ss. George Joseph Reis, Plaintiff, vs. Sarah Ann Reis, Defendant. Notice to non-resident defendant to take depositions. The above named defendant, Sarah Ann Reis will take notice that on Wednesday the 14th day of June 1899 the said George Joseph Reis, above named plaintiff will take the depositions of Anna Reis and Frederick Reis, Sundry witnesses, to be used as evidence on the trial of the above entitled cause, at the office of Sullivan & Co. No. 1159 Columbus Avenue, in the city of Boston, county of Suffolk and state of Massachusetts between the hours of 9 o'clock a. m. and 6 o'clock p. m. of said day and the taking of said depositions will be adjourned from day to day, between the same hours, until they are completed. GEORGE JOSEPH REIS, plaintiff. By J. C. McNamee, his attorney.

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