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SISMONDI.¹

Never was there a juster observation, than that, in ordinary times, in the same state, genius moves in a circle; originality is lost amidst imitation; we breathe thought not less than vital air. This is more especially the case in all those branches of opinion or philosophy which relate to internal economy, or the social concerns of men. There, it is not merely abstract principle, or disinterested reasoning, which have struck their roots into the human mind; interest, prejudice, passion, have moved it yet more deeply, and rendered the change from one set of opinions to another still more difficult. Universally it will be found, that in regard to the social concerns of men, which are so closely interwoven with our habits, interests, and affections, the transition from error to truth can rarely be accomplished by any intellect, how powerful soever, which has not imbibed, in part at least, the maxims of foreign states. New ideas, like lightning, are produced by the blending of two streams of thought, wafted from different ages or parts of the world. The French political revolution was brought about by the meeting of new-born French fervour with long-established English ideas: the Anglomania which immediately preceded that convulsion is the proof of it. The English social revolution has proceeded from the same cause: it is the junction of British practical habits with French speculative views which has produced the political economy of modern times: and the whole doctrines of free-trade which Adam Smith matured, and recent times have reduced to practice, are to be found in the *Physiocratie* of Dupont de Nemours, and the political pamphlets of Turgot.

It was in the year 1775 that these doctrines, imported from France, were first broached in this country by the publication of the *Wealth of Nations*; and it took half a century for them to pass from the solitary meditation of the recluse into the cabinets of statesmen and the hustings of the populace. Now, however, this transformation of thought is general, at least in a considerable part of the mercantile and manufacturing portions of the community. Few in the great cities of the empire think of doubting the doctrines of free-trade: fewer still, if they doubt them, venture to give publicity to their opinions. The reason of this general concurrence among commercial men, and of this, in social matters, rapid conversion of general thought, is to be found in the circumstance, that the new opinions fell in with the interests, or at least the immediate interests, of the leaders and influential men among the mercantile classes. The remainder, not understanding the subject, yielded by degrees to what they were told, by their superiors in wealth and intelligence, were incontrovertible propositions. Manufacturers who enjoyed the advantages of coal, ironstone, canals, railroads, and harbours at their doors, very readily embraced the doctrine, that all restrictions on commercial intercourse were contrary to reason; and that all mankind, how destitute soever of these advantages themselves, could do nothing so wise as to admit all their goods without any protective duties whatever. Merchants widely engaged in mercantile speculations, who were buying and selling in all parts of the world, and whose interest it was to purchase as largely and as cheaply as possible, and to sell as extensively and as dearly as was consistent with that extent, had no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion, that commerce should be left perfectly free, that all protective duties for the shelter of native industry should be abolished, and that the only charges on the transport of goods should be the cost of transit and their own profits. Every shilling taken from the import duties was so much put in their pockets,

¹ *Etudes des Sciences Sociales*. Par J. C. Simonde de Sismondi. 3 vols. Paris, 1837.

either directly by their gaining the remitted duty, or by their indirectly feeling the benefit of it, in the reduction of price and the widening of the market. Capitalists and bankers, who had vast sums to lend, found nothing so reasonable as that they should be permitted, without restraint, to exact any amount of usury they chose from the necessities, the folly, or the cupidity of their debtors. The opinion became general, that a nation could only be made rich by the same means as an individual manufacturer, and that the excess of the price obtained for the produce of national labour above the cost of production, was the measure of national wealth.

Under the influence of these opinions, prohibitions, restrictions, and import duties gave way on all sides. To the huge mass of the ignorant vulgar, the very sound of "*abolition of restrictions*" was delightful. Restraint was what they hated, exclusive privilege was their abomination, liberty of thought and action their supposed elysium. To abolish monopolies, incorporations, crafts, guildries, and statutes of apprenticeship, seemed a mighty step in the emancipation of the human race. Thus they cordially and universally joined in the cry for liberation from every sort of restriction, alike in thought, commerce, industry, and action, which had been first raised by the philosophers, and afterwards generally embraced by the capitalists and merchants. Amidst a chorus of congratulations, mutual applauses, and sanguine anticipations, with the cordial approbation of the political economists, the general concurrence of the merchants, and the loud shouts of the multitude, the doctrines of free-trade were progressively applied to every part of the social body. Taxes upon imports have been diminished, till, on all save a few articles, they are now entirely removed; native industry has been exposed, with a very slender protection, to the competition of foreign states; the restraints on the exportation of machinery has been removed, to allow foreign nations every advantage in competing with us; punishment has been alleviated, till the penalty of death, save in cases of wilful murder, has become practically abolished; the liberty of the press pushed the length of allowing without control its utmost licentiousness; unbounded toleration permitted in matters of opinion, even so far as generally to proclaim impunity to the worst Chartist or Socialist doctrines; combinations among workmen to raise their wages declared legal, and carried into practice on the greatest scale in all the manufacturing districts; a great organic change introduced into the constitution, to render Government more thoroughly dependent on public opinion; taxes to the amount of above thirty millions sterling, on articles of consumption, repealed in less than thirty years; a vast monetary change, to lower prices by raising the value of money, introduced, and steadily enforced, in spite of unbounded consequent distress; and the principle of free competition introduced generally as the basis of the social union, the only sure guarantee of national prosperity.

"Experience," says Dr Johnson, "is the great test of truth, and is perpetually contradicting the theories of men." Never, since the beginning of the world, had the doctrines of philosophers been so generally embraced by Government, or measures really intended for the public good so extensively carried into effect by the Legislature. Unbounded were the anticipations of prosperity and happiness in which men generally indulged on the adoption of this system; inflexible has been the steadiness with which it has been adhered to, amidst an amount of suffering which would long ago have proved fatal to any set of measures among men, except those dictated by their own opinions. But amidst all these anticipations, and this steadiness in carrying out the doctrines of free-trade in every department of thought and action, various unpleasant indications began to manifest themselves in every part of society; and it became evident to all that the fruits of the tree of knowledge were not, in this generation at least, destined to be different from what they had proved to our First Parents. While wealth was increasing to an unparalleled extent among the commercial classes, suffering and distress as generally ensued among the rural inhabitants; and the multitude of ruined fortunes among them rendered it certain, that at no distant period the old race of landed proprietors would, with the exception of a few magnates, be all rooted out, and their place supplied by a new set of purchasers from the commercial towns. While population was advancing with unparalleled strides in the manufacturing districts, pauperism even more than kept pace with it in all; and the extraordinary fact has now been revealed

by statistical researches, that, in an age of unparalleled wealth and general and long-continued peace, a *seventh* part of the whole inhabitants of the British islands are in a state of destitution, or painfully supported by legal relief.²

While all attempts, even, to pay off the national debt have been abandoned by Government, and the principle openly proclaimed by the Prime Minister, that any surplus of revenue above expenditure must, to relieve the necessities of the country, be applied to the reduction of taxation, without a thought to the reduction of the debt; the Home Secretary has announced the not less alarming fact, that, since the peace, above two hundred millions sterling, or a fourth of the national debt, has been raised for the relief of the poor in England alone. While the returns of the income-tax have demonstrated that seventy thousand persons in Great Britain possess among them an annual revenue of two hundred millions a-year, or about L.2300 each on an average, the melancholy fact has been revealed, by the result of attempts to increase the national revenue by means of indirect taxation, that that source of income can no longer be relied on; and in a time of profound, and at the close of a period of long-continued peace, it has become indispensable to recur to an assessment on property and direct taxation, as it was in Rome in the decaying periods of the empire. The blue folios of the Houses of Parliament teem with authentic and decisive evidence of the vast increase, during the last thirty years, of crime and frequent destitution among the working classes in all parts of the empire; every four or five years, a brief feverish period of gambling, extravagance, and commercial prosperity, is succeeded by a long and dreary season of anxiety, distress, and depression; frightful strikes among the workmen, attended with boundless distress among, and hideous democratic tyranny over them, invariably succeed in the close of those periods of suffering, as pestilence stalks in the rear of famine; and popular insurrection has become so common, that it is a rare thing to see two years pass over without martial law being of necessity practically enforced in some part of the empire. Efforts unheard-of have been made to extend the religious establishments of the state, or augment the means of moral and intellectual instruction among the people; but hitherto with no perceptible effect in checking the habits of sensuality, improvidence, and intemperance, which prevail amongst them; and in an age and a country abounding, beyond any other that ever existed, with declamations in favour of the blessings of knowledge, and the elements of happiness and moral improvement, which free-trade and a general liberation from restraint were to procure for society, the scandal has been exhibited of serious crime having, during the last forty years, increased TEN TIMES as fast as the number of the people.³

We are so accustomed in this country to those things, that they have ceased to make any impression upon us. The great majority of men, actively engaged in the business of life, pay no attention to them whatever, but go on labouring to make money, or keep themselves afloat in the world, without bestowing even a passing thought of whither that world on which they are so intent is tending. Philosophers and political economists, confounded at beholding such results flowing from the adoption and practical application of their favourite principles, quietly pass by on the other side; and, without denying the facts, content themselves with disregarding them altogether, and continuing to prophesy unbounded national prosperity and moral elevation from the ultimate effect of the further abolition of restraint on thought and action. The religious portion of the community – and they form a large and highly respectable body – consider these alarming symptoms as the judgment of Heaven upon us for our sins, and the natural and well-deserved consequence of our neglect of the means of salvation, which have been so mercifully put into our hands. The merchants and manufacturers, who are rapidly making fortunes under the new system, maintain that it is founded on pure and tried reason, and that in no other way can the national resources be fully developed. The landowners, who

² Viz.: —just a seventh of the whole inhabitants, who are now about 28,000,000.

³ Committals for serious crime, in — Porter's *Parl. Tables and Prog. of the Nation*, iii. 172, 227. From this table it appears, that from 1805 to 1842 the population of the empire has advanced from 158 to 273 – that is, increased about 70 *per cent*; while serious crime has increased from 8 to 56 – that is, 700 *per cent*. Crime, therefore, has augmented ten times as fast as the number of the people.

are as rapidly losing them, are, in part, so paralysed by their individual embarrassments, in part so perplexed with the intricacy of the subject, that they are incapable of making any efforts, except on particular occasions, in their own defence, but resign themselves quietly to the stroke of fate, as the Moslem does to the bowstring of the Suldaun. The working classes are quiet during the brief periods of prosperity; but nourish in their hearts at all times a profound jealousy and hatred of the monied interest. The opinion is almost universally diffused among them, that the gains of their employers are scandalously great, and wrung out of their heart's blood – that they and their masters are naturally at war with each other – and that whatever is gained by the one is lost by the other. Meanwhile Government, obeying the new, and, as matters stand, irresistible impulse let in upon the monarchy by the Reform Bill, quietly, slide into the principles and measures dictated to them by the dominant, most active, and most influential class in the state; and, shutting their eyes to the consequences in future times, content themselves with getting through the present with as much practical support and as little obloquy as possible.

But although this is, generally speaking, the state of opinion on all social questions in the British islands, it may well be imagined that they are looked upon with very different eyes by men of intelligence out of the whirl of passing events, and beyond the reach of the passions or interests which mislead so many in this country. The civilization of Great Britain; the social questions at issue amongst us; the experiment making, on so extended a scale, of the effect of the new doctrines on the happiness of the people in the British islands; the prodigious wealth which has been accumulated in this country of late years; the magnitude and long duration of our political power; and the celebrity in arts, in arms, and in literature we have long enjoyed, have struck all surrounding nations with astonishment, which, so far from diminishing, is hourly on the increase. This effect appears variously, according to the temper and previous prepossessions of those among whom it has taken place. In the French, our ancient rivals, our persevering antagonists in the revolutionary war, it has produced no other effect, generally speaking, but envy, hatred, and malice. In the Americans, it has engendered a mingled feeling of respect, admiration, and jealousy, which appears in the strenuous efforts they are making to augment their wealth, power, and territory, by every possible means, and in every possible direction. But in reflecting minds on the Continent, on the really great in all countries, it has produced the effect of deep reflection, and anxious investigation. They have already begun to contemplate the astonishing and long-continued empire of Great Britain as we, and all subsequent ages, have so long done the corresponding, and only parallel, dominion reared by the arms of the Roman legions. In the causes of the greatness, and seeds of ruin, in both, there is a striking, and to us portentous, resemblance. The analogy has been already traced by more than one master-hand on the Continent. But none was better qualified to do justice to the subject, or has treated it in a more luminous or philosophic spirit, than Sismondi; and it is to his observations on the present social state of the British empire that we have now to direct our readers' attention.

As the views of this great philosopher and historian are almost entirely at variance with those which now generally prevail amongst us, and to which the liberal party in every part of the country have in an especial manner pinned their faith, and, at the same time, seem to be deserving of very great attention from their novelty and importance, and direct bearing on the dearest interests of the society with which we are surrounded – we hasten to premise that, in forming them, Sismondi has at least not been blinded by any *political* partiality for the side to which, in *social* questions, he inclines. He is, as all persons acquainted with foreign literature well know, a decided liberal, indeed republican, in his political opinions. Born and educated in the democratic canton of Geneva, a Protestant both by birth and connexion, the decided opponent of tyranny in all its forms, of Romish domination in all its guises, he first matured his powerful mind in writing the history of the Italian republics, and afterwards had his opinions confirmed by tracing the long annuals of the French monarchy. The brilliant episodes in the history of the former, contrasted with the hideous catalogue of persecutions and crimes which stain the latter, have confirmed in his mind, to a degree which, considering the

extent of his information, and candour of his thoughts, appears surprising – the original prepossessions he had imbibed in favour of republican institutions. He even carries this so far as to advocate in his Essays, which form the immediate subject of this paper, an elective in preference to an hereditary monarchy. He is as ardent an enthusiast in the cause of civil and religious liberty as Russell or Sidney, though his views are modified as to time, by observation and experience. He yields to none of the optimist school of more recent times in sanguine expectations of the benefits which may be expected from training the people to the duties of self-government, and ultimately entrusting them with its powers. He is adverse to an hereditary aristocracy, and strongly advocates the division of landed property, by adopting in all countries the law of equal succession, which has given its powers their deathblow both in France and America. His life has been spent in painting the bright efflorescence of freedom and genius in the modern Italian republics, and their long blight under the combined powers of feudal power and Romish superstition in the French monarchy. The perfection of society, in his estimation, would be an aggregate of little republics, like those of Greece or southern Italy in ancient, or of Holland, Florence, Pisa, or Genoa, in modern times – in which supreme power was vested in the hands of magistrates, named by the heads of trades, who had been themselves elected by the general suffrage of their respective bodies. Many readers will probably be surprised at finding such political opinions entertained by a man of such acquirements, and class it with the numerous instances which history affords, of the inability of the greatest minds entirely to throw off the sway of early impressions and hereditary prepossessions. But we are not concerned, in this place, with Sismondi's political opinions; it is his views on social questions that appear peculiarly important, and which we are desirous of making known to our readers. And we mention his political opinions in order to show, that he at least cannot be accused of a prejudice in favour of the monarchical, or aristocratic, side of the question.

It is from a leaning to, and sympathy with, the opposite class in society, that his strong and important views on the tendency of social change in Europe, and especially in Great Britain and France, are directed. He is decidedly of opinion, that this tendency is, to the last degree, disastrous; that it is it which is the cause of the continued depression of industry, degradation of character, and increase of depravity and crime, among the people; and that, so great and alarming are these causes of evil, that, unless they are arrested by a change of opinion among the influential classes of society, or the good providence of God, they will infallibly destroy the whole fabric of European civilization, as they did that of the ancient world. They are, in his own opinion, the more alarming, that they have sprung, not from the blighting, but the triumph, of what we call civilization; not from the retention of men in ignorance, but their advance in knowledge; not from the upholding of restraint, but its removal. All these, the former evils with which mankind had to contend, will, in his opinion, yield to the growth of industry and the progress of knowledge; but in their stead a new set of evils – more serious, more wide-spread, more irremediable – will rise up, which, to all appearance, must in the end destroy all the states of modern Europe. England and France he considers, and probably with reason, as the states most likely to be the first victims of those social evils, far more serious and irremediable than any of the political which attract so much attention, and are the objects of such vehement contention between parties into which society is divided. England and France are not alone exposed to the danger; all the other European states are advancing in the same career, and are threatened, in the end, with the same calamities. England and France have been the first to be reached, and are now most endangered, by them, only because they are in advance of the others in the career of knowledge, freedom, and civilization, and have attained more rapidly than their neighbours the power and energy by which modern society is distinguished, and the perils by which it is menaced. In the social evils, therefore, with which Great Britain is now environed, he sees the precursor of those which are certainly, at one period or another, to afflict all Europe; and in the overthrow of our empire, from the corroding effect of the calamities they will induce, the ultimate destiny of all the states of modern times.

That these views are melancholy, all will admit; that they are important if true, none will deny; that they are new, at least in this country, will be conceded by the best informed. They come, however, recommended to us, not merely by the powerful arguments and copious facts by which they are supported, but by the peculiar turn of mind, and varied qualifications, of the author by whom they are supported. We have long been of opinion, that it is the separation of political economy from history which is the chief cause of the numerous errors into which, since the days of Adam Smith, its professors have been betrayed, and the general discredit into which the science itself has fallen with a large portion of the thinking men in the community. This effect has taken place, as it was very natural it should in the infancy of a science, from the habit into which philosophers and men of abstract thought were led, of reasoning on human affairs as if they were the movement of inanimate bodies, and considering only their own arguments, not the illustration of their truth or falsehood which experience has afforded. This habit is peculiarly conspicuous in the advocates of free-trade, the reciprocity system, and Mr Malthus's doctrines on pauperism and the poor-laws; they rest on abstract arguments, and are perfectly indifferent to the refutation of their principles which every day's experience is affording. Probably the whole present generation of political economists must go to their graves before this general error is eradicated from the human mind. It is an error, however, of the most fatal kind, and which, while it is persevered in, must render political economy one of the greatest of the many curses, which the eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge has let loose upon mankind. It is like a system of medicine, formed, as such systems are in every age, not on experience or observation, but on the theories of certain physicians on the structure of the human body, and the proper way of developing its various functions.

Many a patient in every age has been killed, before the absurdity of such theories has been put down by the experience and common-sense of mankind. And many a nation, in Sismondi's opinion, will perish, before the nostrums of its state physicians have been expelled from the general opinion of man.

It is his profound and varied historical information, which has given Sismondi his deep distrust of nearly all the conclusions of modern political economy, and inspired him with the gloomy presentiments with which he is filled, in regard to the tendency of society under the practical application of its principles. He has fixed his eyes, not on abstract principles, but actual nations, and traced the result, not of theoretical views on the best regulations for society, but of such as have actually been established, and had their tendency tested by the experience of centuries in different ages and countries of the world. He sees with dismay, in the state of society in modern Europe, under the combined influence of free-trade, increasing knowledge, popular institutions, vast wealth, and long-established civilization, a mere repetition, under different names, of those dreadful social evils which corroded the Roman empire, and in the end overturned the vast physical dominion of the legions. He sees in that state of rural society which is nearly extinct in the British islands, and fast wearing out in France, Belgium, and other parts of Europe, where civilization is most advanced, the only solid foundation for general happiness, the only durable bulwark of public morality, the only permanent security for national existence. This state of society is disappearing, and a new condition of men coming on, from causes which seem beyond the power of human control, but the fatal effect of which is as apparent as the sun at noonday. And thence the gloomy views with which he is inspired on the future prospects of Europe, and his profound hostility to the principles of political economy, from which he considers them as having mainly arisen.

Political economy, as a science, dates its origin, by the common consent of men, from the famous work "On the Nature and Causes of the *Wealth* of Nations." But a greater authority than Adam Smith has told us, that "he that HASTENETH TO BE RICH SHALL NOT BE INNOCENT." Sismondi's doctrines on political economy are a commentary on these words, applied to the management of nations and the social concerns of man. It is in the fatal thirst for wealth, and the application of all the powers of knowledge, and all the resources of art, to *that single object*, that he

sees the all-powerful cause, both of the present degradation of so many of the working classes, of the false direction of political philosophy, and of the spread of social evils, which will to all appearance, in the end prove fatal to the existence of the British empire, and of all the European communities. But it is not any general or vague declamation on the progress of corruption, and the growing evils of society, which he has brought forward; he has given a close and cogent chain of reasoning, supported by a formidable array of historical facts, and shown how it is that the evils have arisen – how they bear upon the condition of the great bulk of the people, how they degrade their character, how their habits corrupt their morals and destroy their happiness; and how irremediable, under the prevailing ideas of the influential classes in society, these evils have become. The social injustice and political delusions which, history has now clearly ascertained, were the causes of the ruin of the Roman empire, he sees re-appearing amidst us under different names, but in still more aggravated forms, and with more hopeless influences on society. All this he traces mainly to the ruinous pursuit of wealth, which has seized alike upon our philosophers, our statesmen, and our practical men; which has too fatally verified the saying of Scripture, that "the love of money is the root of all evil;" and converted the noble science of political economy, the end of which is "ut homines feliciter vivant," into the degrading handmaid of wealth.

So strongly is he impressed with this idea, and so convinced of the ruinous direction which the social sciences are taking, under the combined influence of philosophic error and monied ambition, that he thinks it indispensable, that language should mark the lasting and indelible crisis of distinction between the philosophy of general happiness and the means by which national wealth may be augmented. The first he calls "Economie Politique," or "Les Sciences Sociales;" the last "*Chrematistique*," or the art of accumulating riches in a state.⁴ It is in the conversion of political economy, or the science of making men happy, which of course can only be done by rendering them orderly, moral, and religious, into *Chrematistique*, or the mere pursuit of the means by which we may augment the sum of national riches, that the unobserved source of by far the greatest social evils of the present day is to be found. These evils are greater than either the slavery of the Romans or the bondage of serfs in modern times; for they have induced the ruinous effects of both these degrading systems, without the alleviating and counteracting advantages with which either was attended. And the way in which this effect flows from the social doctrines of modern times, is this.

An augmentation of production is generally considered as an addition to national wealth; and it is on this ground that all nations, under the guidance of the *Chrematists*, are making such strenuous efforts to increase their agricultural and manufactured produce. Such an augmentation, however, says Sismondi, is not only by no means in every case an addition to national wealth, but it is often a useless and pernicious addition to national suffering. If the supply of any article exceeds what can be consumed in the early and simple ages of society, or disposed of to advantage in the later, it is not only no advantage, but a positive loss. What avails it that the yards of cotton cloth manufactured, or the quarters of wheat raised, are increased in a country from 50,000,000 to 100,000,000, if, in consequence of the increased supply, the price is lowered one-half? The producers get their trouble for their pains – they gain nothing – the consumers get more than they require – great part of the superfluity is wasted or sent abroad at a ruinous loss. Augmentation of production, therefore, is not in every case a sign of increased national wealth; it is the *maintenance of a due proportion between production and consumption* which is the real desideratum, and forms the only real basis of lasting national opulence.

According to the *Chrematists*, the wealth of a nation, as of an individual producer, is to be measured by the excess of the value of production over its cost. This, says Sismondi, is the most fatal of all errors, and the grand source of the misery of the working classes, and instability of society, in all the manufacturing states of Europe. It is true, the wealth of a master-manufacturer is to be

⁴ From χρημα – "money, riches."

measured by the excess of the price he obtains for his produce over the cost of its production; but a master-manufacturer is not a nation. A nation consists not only of masters but of workmen; not only of consumers but producers. The latter class is by far the most numerous, the most important, the most likely to increase. If they are reduced to misery in consequence of the reduction of their wages by the introduction of machinery, the employment of juvenile or female labour, the immigration of foreign labourers, or any other cause, it is a poor compensation to say, that the profits of their employers have been greatly augmented at their expense. If the excess of the value of production above its cost, were either the measure, or even an important element in national wealth, Ireland, where the wages of field labour are 6d. a-day, and Poland, where they are 3d., should be the richest nations in the world, whereas they are notoriously the poorest. The real measure of national wealth is to be found, not in the excess of production above the consumption employed in it, but in the means of comfortable livelihood which their industry affords to the *whole* classes of the community; and that is only to be attained where wealth is very generally distributed.

The mere increase of national wealth is far from being, in every instance, an addition either to national strength, national security, or national happiness. On the contrary, it is often the greatest possible diminution to the whole three. It is not the increase of wealth, but *its distribution*, which is the great thing to be desired. It is on that that the welfare and happiness of society depend. When wealth, whether in capital or revenue, runs into a few hands – when landed property accumulates in the persons of a knot of territorial magnates, and commerce centres in the warehouse of a limited number of merchant princes, and manufactures in the workshop of a small body of colossal companies or individual master-employers, it is *absolutely certain* that the great bulk of the people will be in a state of degradation and distress. The reason is, that these huge fortunes have been made by diminishing the cost of production – that is, the wages of labour – to such an extent, as to have enormously and unjustly increased the profits of the stock employed in conducting it. Society, in such circumstances, is in the unstable equilibrium: it rests on the colossal wealth, territorial or commercial, of a few; but it has no hold on the affections or interests of the great majority of the community. It is liable to be overturned by the first shock of adverse fortune. Any serious external disaster, any considerable internal suffering, may at once overturn the whole fabric of society, and expose the wealth of the magnates only as a tempting plunder to the cupidity and recklessness of the destitute classes of society. "There is as much true philosophy as poetry," says Sismondi, "in the well-known lines of Goldsmith

—
'Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates and men decay!
Princes and lords may flourish or may fade —
A breath may make them as a breath has made;
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroy'd, can never be supplied.'"

The *Chrematists* always represent an increase of national wealth as necessarily flowing from an augmentation of the riches of the individuals who compose it. But this is the greatest possible mistake. Great part of the riches obtained by individuals in a state, so far from being an addition to the national wealth, is an abstraction from it. The reason is, that it is made at the expense of others in the same community; it is a transference of riches from one hand to another, not an addition to their total amount. Every one sees that the gains of the gamester, the opera-dancer, the lawyer, are of this description; what they take is taken from others in the same community. But the magnitude of the gains of merchants and manufacturers blinds the world to the real nature of their profits, which, in great part at least, are made at the expense of others in the state. If the importing merchant makes extravagant gains, he indeed is enriched; but how is he enriched? In part, at least, he is so, by

impoverishing such of his countrymen as purchase his goods at the exorbitant price which constitute his profits. If the exporting merchant or manufacturer drives a gainful trade, it is in part, without doubt, derived from the industry of foreign nations to whom the export goods are sold; but it is too often earned at the expense also of the workmen he employs, who have been compelled by competition, or destitution, to sell their labour to him at a rate barely sufficient for the support of existence. We are not to flatter ourselves that the nation is becoming rich, because the exporters of Irish grain, Paisley shawls, or Manchester cotton goods, are making fortunes, when the labourers they employ are earning from sixpence to eightpence a-day only. On the contrary, the magnitude of the gains of the former is too often only a measure of the destitution and degradation of the latter.

It is usually considered that it is a sufficient answer to this to observe, that if riches are thus, from the direction which national industry has taken, drawn to a distressing extent from one class of the community to concentrate them in another, a corresponding benefit is conferred upon other classes, by the increased expenditure which takes place on the part of those, in whose hands the wealth has accumulated. There can be no doubt that a certain compensation does take place in this way; and it is the existence of that compensation, which alone renders society tolerable under such circumstances. But the benefit accruing is no adequate set-off, if society be viewed as a whole, to the evil incurred. If two millions of Irish labourers are working at sixpence a-day each, and two millions more of human beings, in the Emerald Isle, are in a state of destitution, it is a poor compensation for such a dreadful state of things to observe, that some hundred Irish noblemen, or absentee proprietors, are spending ten or twenty thousand a-year each amidst the luxuries of London, Paris, or Naples; and that they sometimes extract five or six guineas an acre from their starving tenants. If weavers in Renfrewshire, and cotton operatives in Lancashire, are making cotton cloths at eightpence a-day of wages, we are not to be deluded into the belief that society is prosperous, because every year six or eight cotton lords buy estates for a hundred thousand pounds a-piece; and one-half of the railways in the kingdom are constructed with the wealth of Manchester and Glasgow. There are no two things more different than national riches and the wealth of the rich in a nation.

It is the fatal and ruinous effect of wealth, thus accumulated in the hands of a few, at the expense of the great bulk of the industrious classes in a state, that it tends to perpetuate and increase the diseased and perilous state of society from which it sprang. The common observations, that money makes money, and that poverty breeds poverty, show how universally the experience of mankind has felt that capital, in the long run, gives an overwhelming advantage in the race for riches to the rich, and that poverty as uniformly, ere long, gives the vast superiority in numbers to the poor. We often hear of an earl or a merchant-prince mourning the want of an heir, but scarcely ever of a Highland couple or an Irish hovel wanting their overflowing brood of little half-naked savages. We occasionally hear of a poor man raising himself by talent and industry to fortune; but in general he does so only by associating his skill with some existing capital, and giving its owner thus the extraordinary advantage of uniting old wealth with a new discovery. To get on in the world without capital is daily becoming more difficult to the great bulk of men: it is, in trade or commerce, at least, wholly impossible. Thus, as wealth accumulates in the capital and great cities of the empire, destitution, poverty, and, of course, crime and immorality, multiply around the seats where that wealth was originally created. And this evil, so far from abating with the lapse of time, daily increases, and must increase till some dreadful convulsion takes place, and restores the subverted balance of society; because the power of capital, like that of a lever which is continually lengthened, is daily augmenting in the centres of wealth; and the power of numbers in the centres of destitution is hourly on the increase, from the reckless and improvident habits which that destitution has engendered.

The happiness of a nation, its morality, order, and security, are mainly, if not entirely, dependent on the extent to which *property* with its attendant blessings, and habits of reflection, regularity, and industry, are diffused among the people. But the doctrines of the *Chrematists*, and of nearly the whole school of modern political economists, go almost entirely to uproot this inestimable blessing. The

principle being once fixed in men's minds, and acted upon by individual men and the legislature, that the great thing is to diminish the *cost of production*, it follows, as a very natural consequence, that the main thing is to diminish the *wages of the producers*. Every thing which can conduce to that object is vigorously pursued, without the slightest regard to the effect the changes must have on the fortunes, and ultimate fate in life, of whole classes in society. It is thus that, in agriculture, the engrossing of farms takes place – an evil so sorely felt in England during the seventeenth, and in Scotland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – and that hundreds and thousands of happy families are dispossessed from their hereditary possessions, to make room for that "devourer of the human race," as the old writers called it, the sheep. It is thus that, in our own times, the small tenants and cotters have been so generally dispossessed in Scotland and Ireland, to make room for the large cultivator or store farmer. It is thus that the race of hand-loom weavers, who carry on their trade in their own houses, and with the advantages of rural residence, gardens, fields, and country air, is every where becoming extinct, or their wages have fallen so low as barely to support existence in the very humblest rank of life. In the room of these sturdy old children of the soil, has sprung up a race of puny operatives or labourers, living by wages, and having no durable connexion either with the land, or even with the capitalist who employs them. Employed at weekly wages, they are constantly on the verge of famine if turned out of their employment. Every thing now is concentrated in huge mills, manufacturing districts, and great towns, where the labour of men is too often supplanted by women, that of women by children, that of children almost entirely by machinery, on which they attend. The cost of production, indeed, is prodigiously diminished, by the substitute of these feeble or tiny labourers for that of full-grown men; and with it the profits of the masters, and the circle of the export sale, are proportionally augmented; but at what expense is this profit to a few gained? At the expense, in some degree, at least, it is to be feared, of the independence, the comfort, the morals, the lives, of whole classes of the labouring portions of the community.

The application of knowledge to the arts, of science to manufactures, so far from diminishing, has, hitherto at least, had the most ruinous possible effect in increasing this fatal tendency of great capital and extensive manufactured industry upon mankind. Watt, Arkwright, Crompton – those giants of intellectual power, whose discoveries have augmented tenfold, often an hundredfold, the productive powers of manufacturing labour – have been the worst enemies that the happiness and morals of the working manufacturers ever knew. For what is it that, by means of great capital, working with the powers which their immortal discoveries have conferred, manufacturing industry has become? Why, it has all, or nearly all, run into huge mills, or other establishments, in which machinery, at a cost of thirty, forty, or fifty thousand pounds, is erected, and a crowd of needy women and children are employed, in ordinary times, at the lowest wages which can support existence, with a few men at a guinea or twenty-five shillings a-week, to direct and superintend their labours. It need not be told what the habits of such a crowd of young women, most of them from fourteen to twenty, must in general be. These evils in manufacturing districts are universally felt and complained of; but it is not equally generally admitted, that they arise invariably, and, as matters at present stand, inevitably, from that very extension of science and mechanical power to the arts, which is, in the view of the increase of national wealth, so just a subject of exultation, and which it is so much the object, both of legislative enactment and of individual ingenuity, to augment and extend. Yet, is not the crushing effect of these great discoveries on the welfare of the labouring classes, as manifest as their elevating influence on the fortunes of their employers, and the sum total of the produce of national manufactured industry? On no other principle is it possible to explain the prodigious accumulation of wealth in one class of the British empire, and of degradation, misery, crime and destitution in the other, and far more numerous classes.

The division of labour and the confining of each workman, or workchild, to one limited sphere of employment, while it is productive of a very great increase in the skill which each exerts in his own department, and in consequence augments, in a similar proportion, the net produce of manufactured

industry, is still more fatal to the morals, habits, and independence of the manufacturing classes. Variety of occupation is indispensable to vigour of mind or independence of character. The exclusive chaining of the human mind to one employment, even though that employment is of the most intellectual kind, as the duties of the lawyer, the statesman, the physician, or the divine, speedily contracts the understanding, narrows the interest, circumscribes the field of enjoyment, and often hardens the heart. If this is the case, as undoubtedly it is, with those who are exclusively immersed even in the learned professions, which require an exercise of thought, and can be founded only on a long and cultivated education, how much more must it be the case with those whose occupation is purely mechanical, and so trivial that it may be learned in a few days – as twirling a film, twisting a cotton, dabbing a plate, or drawing a cloth out of a vat? Such operatives are exposed, at every period of their lives, to the greatest evils which can debase humanity – uncertainty of subsistence and monotony of occupation. Their work is so simple, that any one can learn it in a few days – therefore they are exposed to competition with the whole labouring classes of the community; – it is so uniform, that it neither requires, nor is compatible with, intellectual elevation – therefore it is speedily made, by the effect of competition for such simple employment, to engross their whole time. Mental improvement, moral or religious cultivation, are scarcely possible to any but the strongest minds united to the strongest bodies, in the circumstances to which the working classes, under such a system, are speedily reduced. If any one doubts this, let him dig, or hoe, or walk along the road, or trundle a hoop, or bear a fowling-piece for twelve hours a-day without intermission, save at breakfast and dinner, and then see with what appetite he can take to moral or intellectual improvement when he comes in at night.

It is the deplorable effect of such a state of things, that it tends not merely to perpetuate, but increase, the very evils from which it has arisen, and reduce the working classes to that state, wherein extrication from them is next to impossible. Under the pressure of the ceaseless desire to cheapen production and diminish the cost of manufacture, young persons of both sexes are huddled together into mills and factories, at so early a period of life that they are scarcely fit to leave the nursery. It has recently been found necessary to introduce a special statute to prohibit children being employed in print-fields in England under *eight* years of age. They are so because they can at once earn sixpence or eightpence a-day by standing beside a wheel, or watching a film of cotton which is discharged out of a machine; and this cheap and infantine labour is equally attractive to the parents, who thus discover in their offspring a source of income instead of a burden – and the manufacturer, who finds his work done by little docile labourers, too weak to engage in a strike, and yet strong enough to do the work. No exertion of strength is required, at least none at any one moment, in many of these occupations – though the work, when long continued, is to the last degree exhausting; the steam-engine lifts all the weights and furnishes all the power. Thus there is, from the necessities and interests of all concerned, a constant demand for juvenile labour; and this demand speedily produces its own supply, by promoting early marriages, or fostering a swarm of bastards among persons thus thrown together, at the period of life when the passions are the strongest, with a total separation at all times, save bed-time, from that only school of virtue, the parental home.

Moral and intellectual cultivation is, God be praised, not rendered impossible in the more superior and industrious of the manufacturing operatives; but it may be doubted whether the species of literature which is in general presented to them, and unhappily proves most attractive, either strengthens their minds, or improves their happiness. Exciting novels, such as those of Victor Hugo, Janin, Sue, and others of the class; highly wrought pictures of the manners and vices of high life; horrible stories of seduction, murder, and suicide, such as compose so large a part of the modern romance school of France; – are most sure of circulation among the working classes of great towns, because they at once interest and excite the imagination. They are read to the extent, and for the reason, that novels are so generally devoured by the young, the imaginative, and the indolent of both sexes in the higher ranks. The poor operatives, however, have an excuse for the exclusive reading of

such exciting inanities, which does not belong to their higher fellow-citizens; they are so worn out by long-continued toil, that they are unable to *bear the fatigue* of any kind of reading which requires application or reflection. Some, no doubt, are improved by works of a more elevated class, which they contrive to purchase out of their savings, and to devour during the brief period allowed them between labour and repose. But their number is very small in comparison of the whole, as is decisively proved by the limited number of booksellers' shops in the manufacturing towns, compared to those which supply the means of sensual enjoyment. It is seldom in such cities you will find one bookseller's shop for an hundred where beer or spirits are retailed. Many even of those who read are rather injured than improved, both in their habits and their happiness, by the mental cultivation they receive. They contract exaggerated ideas of the enjoyment of riches, and the avenues to distinction, which may be opened by intellectual effort; they become dissatisfied with the station in the world which Providence has assigned them; they strive to exchange bodily for intellectual toil; and in the vain attempt to exchange their lot for a better one, numbers are precipitated into difficulties, crimes, and ruin.

The social organization of trades in all the European cities during the middle ages, was eminently favourable to the working classes; and it was perhaps the greatest calamity that ever befell them, that, in the madness of democratic ambition, they united with the master employers to pull down these institutions. When each craft was organized in a little republic of its own, with its office-bearers, stated meetings, funds for the indigent, and exclusive privileges, a gradation of ranks was created amidst the poor – a little aristocracy of industry, which often proved itself capable of contending with the proudest aristocracy of land or riches. The poor were not left alone; the wrongs of individuals were taken up by their craft; joint measures for the common behoof were pursued; the dreadful feeling of isolation in the midst of a crowd was unknown; all were enrolled under some banner, or entered with some craft. Thus every one felt himself in a fixed and definite place in society; he had privileges and advantages of a tangible kind to forfeit by losing it. But when exclusive privileges, crafts, and incorporations, were abolished, amidst cries of joy and shouts of triumph from the whole popular party all over the world, these inestimable blessings were lost. The poor became a mixed indiscriminate multitude, having no more coherence or power of resistance than a rope of sand. They degenerated into a huge assembly of private soldiers without officers, incapable either of organizing any thing for their own durable benefit, or of resisting the progressive encroachments of capital, machinery, and competition, on the sole domain left them – the wages of their labour. Universally it has been found, that, upon the abolition of incorporations and crafts, the condition of the working classes has rapidly and fearfully changed for the worse. The principle of free competition – of breaking down all barriers – allowing every one to elbow his neighbour out of employment, and bringing every thing down to the lowest and cheapest level – has tended only to lower the wages of labour, and aggravate the insecurity of the poor. No one has a fixed or permanent station; every thing is done for days' or weeks' wages; and the penalty of dismissal is destitution, famine, and a lingering death. Hence the constant complaint now on the part of the poor, that they cannot get work; and the prodigious multitude of the lowest class who are constantly moving about, seeking in one situation that employment they have lost in another. This, however, is of all things the most fatal to their habits, character, and prospects; they get among people to whom they are total strangers, who regard them with aversion as intruders, and are neither inclined to relieve their distresses, nor to facilitate their advance in the world. The most powerful check, next to religion, on human conduct —*the opinion of friends*— is lost on the very class who stand most in need of its control. Obscurity screens immorality from detection; numbers shelter crime from punishment. The temptations to vice multiply, while the barriers against it are cut away. The really good poor are invariably stationary; moving about is as fatal to their habits as it is to those of children. The *free circulation of labour*, of which we hear so much from master employers and the Chrematists, is often an advantage with a view to the creation of wealth, or the sudden completion of great undertakings: considered with reference to national morals, happiness, and ultimate safety, it is one of the greatest curses which can befall a people.

It is a sense of the evils arising from this feeling of isolation amidst multitudes, and the experienced inability of the poor, all struggling against each other for subsistence, to resist the progressive decline of their wages till they reach the lowest point consistent with the support of existence, which has made the working classes in France and England of late years so generally embrace, and make such incredible efforts to support, trades'-unions. They have endeavoured, in so doing, to regain that organization of crafts in separate classes and bodies, which was overturned amidst the shouts of triumph consequent on the French Revolution. But this attempt, so far from palliating the existing evils, has had the greatest possible tendency to aggravate them; for it has too often vested irresponsible power in hands wholly unfit to wield it. Perhaps the greatest, the most wide-spread, the most acute suffering endured by the labouring poor in Great Britain during the last thirty years, has arisen from strikes. Nothing has tended so strongly to shake society to its centre; to array the working classes against their employers; to spread habits of recklessness, violence, and improvidence among them, and alienate their natural supporters from them by the frightful crimes to which they have given rise. Foresight, industry, regularity of conduct, frugality, saving habits – those prime guardians of humble virtue – are out of the question when men are subjected to the tyranny of these dreadful, popularly elected despots. The last and only possession left to the poor – their own labour – is liable to be reft from them by the imperious commands of an unknown and irresponsible committee; which, elevated to importance by the public distress, uses every means to prolong it, by preventing a return to habits of regular industry. The suffering produced by the compulsory cessation from labour which these committees command, often for an incredibly long period, never could be borne but by men inflamed by the spirit of party, and contending for what they ignorantly deem their best interests. It equals all that we read of in heroic besieged towns, enduring the extremities of famine before they submit to the besiegers. The Committee of Public Salvation was often shaken by a scarcity of provisions in the capital, and never failed to tremble at the forests of pikes which, when want became severe, issued from the Faubourg St Antoine; but a trades'-union committee succeeds in compelling men, by threats of the torch and the dagger, to remain in idleness for months together, and surrender their birthright and inheritance, the support of themselves, the food of their children, to the commands of an unknown power, which retains them in the agonies of want till suffering nature can no longer endure. The actual suffering resulting from this unparalleled tyranny, while it continues, is the least of its evils. A far greater, because more durable and irremediable calamity, is to be found in the demoralizing of the poor, by depriving them of occupation, and dividing society, by arraying whole classes against each other.

Industry, during the feudal ages, was often exposed to the most ruthless violence from the hand of power, and men possessed scarce any security against the occasional oppression of arbitrary monarchs, or the savage devastation of martial incursions. But great as these political evils were, it may be doubted whether they occasioned, in the long run, so serious an invasion on human happiness and the springs of human virtue, as the *social evils*, which, on the cessation of these political disorders, have, unobserved, insinuated themselves through society. The annals of the middle ages are filled with the most heart-rending accounts of the outbreaks of savage violence to which the people were subjected; and it appears impossible that society could ever have recovered the dreadful devastation to which it was frequently exposed. Yet it invariably did recover, and that, too, in an incredibly short space of time. The Crusades were the overflow of the full nations of Europe, after two centuries of that apparently withering hostility. We read of no such resurrection of national strength in Rome under the emperors after the devastations of the barbarians began; nor do we hear of any such after the oppression of the pachas and ages in Turkey and Persia at this time. Superficial writers explain this by saying, these nations are in their decline, and the Gothic nations, during the feudal ages, were in their youth. But the human race is, in all ages, equally young; there are an equal number of young men in proportion to the population in every country and in every age. The reason of the difference

is, that social evils have arisen in the one case which were unknown in the other – they have spread and diffused their baneful influence.

The feudal institutions, amidst all their want of protection against political violence or external oppression, had one admirable quality, which enabled society to bear up and advance under all these accumulated evils. They conferred power and influence at home on those only who were *interested* in the welfare of the people. The feudal baron, at the head of his armed followers, was doubtless always ready, at the summons of his sovereign, to perform his fifty days' military service, or, at the call of an injured clansman, to make an inroad into the territories of a neighbouring but hostile feudatory; but when he did so, he had nothing to depend upon but his own retainers, serfs, or followers. If they were depressed, starving, alienated, or lukewarm, he was lost; he was defeated in the field, and speedily besieged in his last stronghold. Thus, the most valuable element was universally diffused over society; viz. a sense of mutual dependence, and of the benefit each derived from the prosperity of his neighbours. If the baron was weak or unsupported, his vassals were liable to be plundered, his serfs found themselves without bread. If the vassals were oppressed, the baron was undone: instead of a formidable array of stout men-at-arms, sturdy archers, and gallant spearmen, to defend his domains, he found himself followed only by a weak and feeble array, giving awful evidence, in the decisive moment, of the ruinous effects of his disorderly or tyrannical government. Even the serfs were bound up with the prosperity of the little community. If they were weakened by bad usage, or driven from the domain by cruelty, the fields were untilled, the swine unherded, the baron and vassals without bread. Thus it was the interest of all to stand by, protect, and spare each other. Each felt the consequences of the neglect of these social duties, in immediate, and often irreparable injury to himself. It was this experienced necessity of mutual forbearance and support, which was the mainspring of social improvement during the feudal ages, and enabled society so quickly to repair the chasm produced by the dreadful political evils to which it was occasionally exposed. Its spring of improvement and happiness was within – its evils were without. We often read, in the annals of those times, of the unbounded plunder and devastation exercised by armed violence upon pacific industry, and the great fortunes sometimes amassed by the robber chivalry, by such predatory incursions. – That is the most decisive proof of the presence of political, and the absence of social evils. The people must have been previously protected and prosperous, or they could not have been worth plundering. The annals of these times will transmit no account of fortunes made by pillaging or taxing the cotters of Ireland, the weavers of Paisley, or the cotton-pickers of Manchester.

What rendered the feudal system in the end insupportable, was the change of manners, strengthening of government, and cessation of private wars, which left its evils, and took away its blessings. When the baron lived in rude plenty on his estate, surrounded by his followers, respected by his vassals, feared by his neighbours, his presence was a benefit, his protection a blessing. But when the central government had acquired such strength as to have stopped private warfare; when standing armies had come to supersede the tumultuary feudal array, and the thirst for luxury or office had attracted the nobles to the capital, these blessings were at an end. The advantages of the feudal system had ceased with the removal of the evils it went so far to alleviate; its burdens and restrictions remained, and were felt as an insupportable restraint, without any corresponding benefit on the rising industry of the people. The seigneur no longer was seen either at the chateau or in the village. In his stead the bailiff made half-yearly visits to exact the rent or feudal services from vassals, whose prosperity had ceased to be any object either of interest or solicitude to their lord. Whether they were rich or poor, happy or miserable, contented or repining, was immaterial to him after he had ceased to reside in his castle, and to be protected by his armed vassals. The one thing needful was to pay their rents, or perform their services, to maintain his extravagances; and these were accordingly exacted with merciless severity. Thence the general oppression of the poor, and universal outcry against the system, which produced the French Revolution.

The powerful central government, regular taxation, and large standing armies of modern Europe, have removed the chief *political* evils which were at times felt with such dreadful severity during the middle ages; but have they not introduced *social* evils of a still more pernicious and irretrievable character? Private wars have disappeared; we no longer hear of chateaux burnt, fields ravaged, or serfs massacred, in pursuance of the deadly feuds of hostile barons. War has become a separate profession; military service is no longer required from the rural tenants; the undivided attention of industry is permitted to be directed to pacific pursuits. The ravages of hostility, and the destruction of conquest, have been diminished in amount, and greatly alleviated in severity. Taxes levied on the whole community, have superseded the necessity, save in extreme cases, of ruinous exactions from individuals; war is often felt rather as a stimulus to industry by its expenditure, than a blight to it from its contributions. It is the influence of these circumstances, joined to the protection of a regular government, and the unbounded stimulus of general freedom, which have given so marvellous an impulse to the prosperity of modern Europe and rendered the British Empire in particular, where their fostering tendency has been most strongly felt, the admiration, the terror, and the envy of the world.

But in lieu of the political oppression and military exactions which, in former days, were felt as so disastrous, a host of *social* evils have sprung up, and are rapidly spreading their baneful influence through every class of society, to such an extent as to render it doubtful whether their effect will not ultimately be to uproot society, and destroy the whole states of modern Europe. These effects have taken place amidst general peace and apparent general prosperity; at a time when wealth was accumulating with unheard-of rapidity, and knowledge was diffused to an unprecedented extent. Law was regularly administered; illegal acts generally checked; foreign hostility averted; domestic oppression removed, or softened. The Chrematists were in exultation; production was every day becoming cheaper; exports and imports in consequence increasing; and all the external symptoms of the highest prosperity, according to the doctrine of the *wealth* of nations, in the most flourishing state. But all these blessings have been neutralized, and a large portion of the community precipitated into the most woful degradation, by the operation of the very causes which have produced this vast increase of wealth, and its astonishing accumulation in the hands of the commercial community. The incessant efforts to lessen the cost of production have beat down the wages of labour, in many departments, to the lowest point; the strenuous exertions made to facilitate cheaper importation, have reduced the remuneration of domestic industry to the lowest point consistent with its existence. Incredible have been the efforts made by all classes to counterbalance by additional industry this disastrous progress; but the only effect of these efforts has been to augment the evil complained of, by increasing the necessity for exertion, and augmenting the mass of productions with which society is flooded. Production in every line has come, in ordinary times, to outstrip consumption. Machinery has quadrupled its power; gorged markets are constantly complained of as depriving industry of its just, and often of any reward at all. Society has become a great gambling-house, in which colossal fortunes are made by a few, and the great majority are turned adrift penniless, friendless, to destitution, ruin, or suicide. The condition of a considerable portion of the working-classes has, in this terrible strife, generally been wofully changed for the worse. Brief periods of high prices, which induce habits of extravagance among them, are succeeded by long seasons of distress, which spread the reality of woe. In the desperate effort made to extend the foreign market, by cheapening production, nearly all the kindly relations of life have been snapped asunder. The operative is unknown to the master-employer; he is turned off at a moment's warning into a cold world, in which he can find no other employment. The tenant is too often unknown to the landlord; or, at least, strangers are constantly brought on the land. The labourer, even, is unknown to the farmer; his place can always be supplied by a stranger, ready, probably, to work for less wages, because in greater distress. Every thing is put up to auction, and sold to the highest bidder. Labour only is awarded to the lowest.

A nation which has surrendered its government to the commercial classes, and at the same time has a large population and considerable territorial possessions, cannot fail to incur ruin if their rule is long continued. The reason is, that their interest is adverse to that of the most numerous, important, and valuable classes of society; and they never cease to prosecute that interest till they have destroyed them. To import largely is for their interest; therefore, they promote all measures tending to favour the introduction of foreign productions, though their effect must be to depress, and in the end extinguish, native industry. They would have the people pay for these imports by enlarged exports; in other words, they would convert society into a mere appendage of the trading classes. To enlarge these exports, they make the most strenuous effort in every possible way to cheapen production – that is, to lower the wages of labour. Their idea of a perfect society is one in which the labouring classes are reduced to the rank of mere attendants on machines, because that is the cheapest form of production. They would have them attend on these machines at sixpence or ninepence a-day, live chiefly on potatoes, and eat no bread but what is imported in foreign vessels, and from foreign countries, because they are cheaper than their own. In this way both exports and imports would be elevated to the highest pitch; for the main part of the national food would figure in the imports, and the main part of national labour in the exports. Mercantile business would come to supersede every other – it alone would be attended with any profit. Meanwhile, domestic industry would languish and decline – the home market would be destroyed – the rural population, the main stay of a nation, gradually withered away and wasted. Poverty and misery would weaken and alienate the working classes; and, amidst a constant increase of exports and imports, and growth of commercial wealth, the nation would be destroyed.

This is no imaginary picture. The ruin of the Roman empire in ancient, the desolation of the Campagna of Rome in modern times, are permanent proofs of its reality.

It is generally said that slavery was the devouring cancer which destroyed the Roman Empire, and thence it is concluded by the Chrematists that, as we have no slaves, we can never be ruined like them. They forget that the reality of slavery may exist, and its evils remain, although its name has been expunged from the statute book. It is always to be recollected that slavery existed to just as great an extent in the most flourishing as in the decaying periods of the Roman dominion – in the days of Scipio and Cæsar, as in those of Constantine or Honorius. Cato was a great dealer in slaves. He was especially careful to sell his slaves when they *became old*, lest, when worn out, they should become chargeable. The republic was brought to the brink of ruin an hundred years before the birth of Christ by the Servile War; yet, with that devouring cancer in its intestines, it afterwards conquered the world. It was not slavery, but the combination of slavery with free-trade and vast patrician and commercial wealth, which really brought ruin on the ancient world. "Verumque confitentibus," says Pliny, "*latifundia* perdidere Italiam: jam vero et provincias." It was the accumulation of patrician revenue and commercial wealth in the capital, when the provinces were cultivated only by slaves, and the gradual extinction of Italian agriculture by the introduction of Egyptian and Lybian grain, where it could be raised cheaper than in the Italian fields, because money was less plentiful in the impoverished extremities than in the gorged centre of the Empire, which was the real cause of its ruin. The free race of Italian cultivators, the strength of the legions, disappeared before the fleets which wafted cheap grain from the banks of the Nile and the shores of Africa to the Tiber. Thence the impoverishing of the small freeholders – the buying up of all small freeholds by the great families – the extinction of grain culture in Italy – the managing of the huge estates into which the country was parcelled, in pasture cultivation, by means of slaves – the disappearance of Italian free-husbandmen – and the ruin of the Empire. So rich was the capital when it fell, that Ammianus Marcellinus has recorded, that when Alaric appeared before Rome, it contained within its walls seventeen hundred and fifty great families, many of whom had estates, almost entirely in pasturage, which yielded them what was equivalent, in English money, to one hundred and sixty thousand pounds sterling of yearly rent.

To the same cause is to be ascribed the continued desolation of the Campagna of Rome in modern times. Slavery has disappeared; but the curse of an unlimited and extraordinary supply of

foreign grain to the Tiber still continues, and chains the proprietors of the *Agro Romano* to pasturage as the only means of profitable cultivation. Travellers are never weary of expressing their astonishment at the desolation which comes up to the very gates of Rome, as of Constantinople; but a very simple cause explains it in both. It is more profitable to keep the land in pasturage than to lay it out in grain cultivation, by reason of the deluge of foreign grain raised in semi-barbarous countries, with which the capital is flooded. From official documents laid before the Papal Government, which made the most anxious and minute enquiries into this subject, it appears that 8000 crowns laid out in agriculture in the Campagna of Rome, at the prices of Rome, would bring in a profit of only 30 crowns a-year; while the same sum laid out on pasturage of sheep on the same land, would bring in 1972 crowns. It is not surprising, in these circumstances, that the Campagna remains in grass.⁵

The cause of this extraordinary state of things is to be found, not in any peculiar adaptation of the Campagna to grass cultivation; for the land is, generally, of the most extraordinary fertility, and in former times, in the infancy of Rome, literally speaking "every rood had its man." The cause, and the sole cause, is to be found in the constant low price of grain in the capital, and the purchase of the *whole of its supply* from foreign states. The Papal Government inherited from its Imperial predecessor the habit, and the necessity, of making periodical distributions of grain, at a cheap rate, to the people. The people inherited, from the lazy successors of the conquerors of the world, the habit of looking to the public stores for cheap distributions of food, as those of Paris did during the Revolution. Government, elective, weak, without any armed force, and in the hands of priests, had not courage to incur the present hazard consequent on a departure from this ruinous system; and they bought their grain, of course, where they could get it cheapest – in Egypt, Odessa, and the Levant. The banks of the Volga are to modern, what those of the Nile were to ancient Rome. The Campagna has been chained to sterility and desolation by the same cause in modern as in ancient times – under the Popes as the Emperors. So far has this evil gone, that in 1797, when the Papal Government was overturned by the French, the *Casa Annonaria* of the Apostolic Chamber, or Board of Public Subsistence, exhibited a deficit of 3,293,000 crowns, (£645,000,) incurred in retailing bread to the people cheaper than they could purchase it even in the cheapest foreign markets.⁶

The Campagna of Rome is the great type of the state to which the doctrine of the Chrematists would reduce the states of modern Europe. Agriculture, ruined by the perpetual curse of foreign importation; urban industry alone flourishing by the stimulus of foreign export; vast fortunes accumulated in the hands of a few merchants and great proprietors; constant distress among the labouring poor; all the symptoms of prosperity in the cities – all the marks of decay in the country; luxury the most unbounded, side by side with penury the most pinching; an overflow of wealth which cannot find employment, in one class of society; a mass of destitution that seeks in vain for work, in another; a middle class daily diminishing in number and declining in importance, between the two extremes; and government, under the influence of popular institutions, yielding to all the demands of the opulent class, because it gives money: and deaf to all the cries of the impoverished, because they can only ask for bread. The name of slavery is indeed abolished in Western Europe, but is its reality, are its evils, not present? Have we not retained its fetters, its restraints, its degradations, without its obligation to support? Are not the English factory children often practically in a worse servitude than in the Eastern harem? If the men are not "*ascripti glebæ*," are they not "*ascripti molinis ac carbonariis*?" What trade can a factory girl or coal-mine child take to, if thrown out of employment? The master cannot flog them, or bring them back by force to his workshop. Mighty difference! He can starve them if they leave it: he chains them to their mills by the invincible bond of necessity. They have the evils of slavery without its advantages. Can, or ought, such a state of things long continue?

⁵ Nicolai, *dell' Agro Romano*, iii. 167-171. Sismondi's *Etudes Sociales*, ii. 46.

⁶ *Ibid.*, iii. 153. *Ib.*, ii. 44. This part of Sismondi's work, which will be found Vol. ii, pp. 1-74, is highly interesting. We may perhaps, at a future period, give a detached account of it, under the title of "The Campagna of Rome."

Whether this is descriptive of the state of society in France and England, let those determine who are familiar with the people of either of these countries.

Such are Sismondi's political views, which are enforced in the volumes before us by a vast array of historical and statistical facts, which, as well as the deservedly acknowledged talent and character of the writer, entitle them to the highest respect, and render them of the deepest interest. That they are "important if true," as the Americans say, no one will deny: that they are of immediate and pressing application to the state of society in the British islands, none acquainted with it, especially in the manufacturing districts, will be so bold as to dispute. We have deemed it best to give an abstract of his opinions and principles in a condensed form, in preference to quoting individual passages, because he expands his ideas so much, that the latter course would have enabled us to give only a limited number of his views. Those who will take the trouble to turn to the original volumes, will find every sentence in the preceding abstract enforced and illustrated at least a dozen times in this most able and original work. That we consider his ideas as in the main just, and his anticipations too likely to prove well-founded, may be inferred from the pains we have taken to form a digest of them in the preceding pages. We only hope that, though he possibly has not much exaggerated the social evils which now threaten society, he has not given their due weight to the many alleviating or corrective causes which, in a free, religious, and moral community, are constantly called into activity when society has come to require their operation. Sismondi says, though he has been enforcing these principles for twenty years, he has found few converts to his opinion in France; and that he does not think he would have found one, if the English Parliamentary Reports had not afforded decisive evidence of the existence of many of these social evils amidst unbounded commercial prosperity and the highest political power in Great Britain. The social evils which destroyed Rome, he reminds us, were in full activity during the eighty years of the splendid, pacific, and wise rule of the Antonines; the most happy, to external appearance, which the world ever knew. Their baneful influence appeared at once, when political dangers commenced with the accession of Commodus. These doctrines are not the less likely to be true that they are contrary to general opinion, that they run counter to many important interests, that they are incapable of present application, that they are adverse to the policy of the rulers of the state. Government rules men, but Providence rules government, and will in the end assert its supremacy, and right the moral evils of mankind, or punish the sins of nations.

MY FIRST SPEC IN THE BIGGLESWADES

My uncle, Scipio Dodger, was one of the most extraordinary men of the age. Figure to yourself a short, stout, and rather pot-bellied individual, with keen eyes moving in a perpetual twinkle, a mouth marked at the corners with innumerable tiny wrinkles, hair of the shortest and most furzy white, scant at the front, but gathered behind into a pig-tail about the size of a cigar; and you have a fair full-length portrait of my avuncular relative. My father, in early years, had married an American lady – I must own it – a Pennsylvanian, and uncle Scipio was her brother. I was the only fruit of that union, and at an early age was left an orphan in circumstances of sufficient embarrassment. A mere accident saved me from being shipped off to America like a parcel of cotton goods. Uncle Scip, who was left my guardian, had some transaction which required his personal attendance at Liverpool. He set foot for the first time on the old country – calculated that it was an almighty fine location – guessed that a spry hand might do a good streak of business there; and, in short, finally repudiated America, as coolly as America has since repudiated her engagements. He would settle down to no fixed trade or profession; but, as he possessed a considerable capital, he entered into the field of speculation. Never, perhaps, was there a man better qualified by nature for success in that usually dangerous game. His powers and readiness of calculation were unequalled – his information quite startling, from its extent and accuracy – his fore-sight, a gift like prophecy. I verily believe he never lost a single shilling in any one of the numerous schemes in which he was engaged; what he made, I have private reasons for keeping to myself. If the apostolic order against taking scrip is to be considered in a literal sense, Scipio was a frightful defaulter. He scampered out of one railway into another like a rabbit perambulating a warren, and was the wonder of the brokers and the glory of the Stock Exchange. Men perverted his Roman prefix, and knew him solely by the endearing appellation of old Scripio.

To me, who was his only living relative, Mr Dodger supplied the place of a parent. He placed me at school and college, gave me as good an education and liberal allowance as I required, and came down regularly once a-year to Scotland, to see how I was getting on. Scripio, though he never failed to taunt the Scotch with their poverty, was, in reality, very partial to that nation; he had a high opinion of their 'cuteness and reputation for driving a good bargain, and – somewhat incongruously, for he was a thorough democrat – piqued himself on his connexion with my family, which was old enough in all conscience, but as poor, in my particular case, as if I had been the lineal descendant of Lazarus. In fact, all my patrimony was the sum of a thousand pounds, firmly secured over land, and not available until I came of age – a circumstance which frequently elicited tornadoes of wrath from uncle Dodger, who swore that, if he had got the management of it, he could have multiplied it tenfold. Subsequent events have convinced me that he was perfectly right.

Be that as it may, I was ultimately called to the Scottish bar, and entered upon my profession with the same zeal, promptitude, and success, which are exhibited by, and attend three-fourths of the unhappy young gentlemen who select that school of jurisprudence. I appeared punctually in the Parliament House at nine, cravatted, wigged, and gowned, to a nicety; took my prescribed exercise, of at least ten miles *per diem*, on the boards; talked scandal with my brethren, (when we could get it,) and invented execrable jokes; lounged at stove and library; wrote lampoons against the seniors; and, in short, went through the whole curriculum expected from a rising votary of Themis. I followed the law diligently; but, somehow or other, I could never overtake it. The agents in Edinburgh must be a remarkably slow set, for they never would appreciate my merits. At the close of two years, a decree in absence, and a claim in a multiplepinding, remained the sole trophies of my legal renown.

One day I was surprised in my study by a visit from uncle Scripio, who had just arrived from Liverpool. I was reading a novel (none of Justinian's) at the moment, and hastily shoved it into my desk. After the usual congratulations were over, the aged file took a rapid survey of the apartment, which fortunately was in tolerable order, glanced curiously at a pile of legal papers, procured – shall

I confess it? – from my friend Cotton, the eminent tobacconist of Prince's Street, uttered a hem, in which incredulity seemed mingled with satisfaction, and then, having been supplied with a tumbler of sherry and ginger-beer – a compound which he particularly affected – he commenced the work of inquisition.

"Well, Fred, my boy, how goes it? Slick, eh? Lots of clients coming in, I suppose? You must be driving a pretty smart trade to judge by them 'ere bundles."

"Pretty well;" I replied, "when my standing at the bar is considered, I have no great reason to complain."

The old fellow looked at me with so quizzical an expression, that I could hardly play the hypocrite longer.

"I'll trouble you for that packet," he said; and, remorselessly clutching a bundle made up with red tape to resemble a process, he took out a written pleading, to which the signature of a counsel, now ten years in the grave, was appended.

"What a devil of a time these lawsuits last!" remarked Mr Dodger, unfolding another document. Worse and worse! It was the juvenile production of a judge in the Inner-House. I had nothing for it but to make a clean breast.

"The fact is, my dear uncle," said I, "these papers are just part of the furniture of a lawyer's room. It would never do, you know, to have an empty table, if an agent *should* happen to come in; but the real truth of the matter is, that the only agents I know are lads with as little business as myself, who sometimes look in of an evening to solace themselves with a cigar."

"I knew it, Fred – I knew it!" said Scripio, rubbing his hands, as if he thought it a remarkably good joke; "there are tricks in all trades, my boy, and the American blood will break out. But you can't do for me, though, you cunning young villain. Oh no! though you wanted to try it on." And he chuckled as heartily as any of Mr Dickens' characters in the Christmas Carol.

"So you ar'n't making a farthing, Freddy?" he resumed; "I'm glad of it. You'll never grease your coach-wheels here. Where's the thousand pounds that were lent over the Invertumblers estate?"

"Mr Constat, the agent of old M'Alcohol, paid it to me about three months ago," replied I, rather astonished at the question, which seemed to have no connexion with the former subject. "I have put it into the National Bank."

"Two per cent? Pshaw – trash!" said my uncle. "Here, look at this;" and he shoved a printed paper into my hands.

It was headed, "Prospectus of the Grand Union Biggleswade, Puddockfield, and Pedlington Railway, in 50,000 shares of £20 each. Deposit £1 on each share." If the line had run through the garden of Eden, supposing that place to have furnished a large passenger traffic besides agricultural produce, with London at one terminus and Pekin at the other, the description could not have been more flattering than that which I perused. Nature seemed to have lavished all her blessings upon Biggleswade, Puddockfield, and the country thereunto adjacent; in short, I never recollect so flattering a picture, with one solitary exception drawn by my friend Frizzle, who had stuck twenty pounds into some railway in a mineral district. "When we recollect," said Bob in a burst of poetical frenzy, "the enormous population of the district, the softness and geniality of the climate, and the fairy aspect of its scenery – when we think of the varied traffic which now chokes up the ordinary avenues of industry – when we estimate the inexhaustible beds of ore and minerals, absolutely heaving themselves from the ground, as though to entreat the aid of man in adapting them to their proper destination; – when we consider all these things, I say, and finally combine them together, fancy closes her astonished eyes, and even imagination swoons!" I will not say that the writer of the Biggleswade prospectus was as soaring a genius as Bob; but he was quite enough of a Claude to seduce the investing public. I forget what amount of return he promised, but it was something hitherto unheard of, and my mouth watered as I read.

"That's the spec!" said my uncle Dodger. "Sit down and write me an order for your thousand."

"Eh, uncle – for the whole?" said I somewhat aghast.

"Every sixpence. There – that will do," and Mr Dodger disappeared with the cheque.

To say the truth, I was not quite pleased with this proceeding; for although I had confidence in my uncle's sagacity, it was decidedly a serious thing to hazard one's whole patrimony on a speculation which might, so far as I knew, be as visionary as the Aërial Machine. However, my constitutional carelessness very speedily relieved me of all anxiety. I went out to balls and steeple-chases as formerly, attended the House *pro formâ* in the mornings, and messed three times a-week with the cavalry at Piershill. The pace, indeed, was rather rapid, but then I had a strong constitution.

For three or four weeks I saw little of my respected uncle. He had – heaven knows how – got himself affiliated to one of the clubs, and sat half the day in the reading-room, poring over the Railway Journals and the Money-market article in the Times. He played whist of an evening on a system peculiar to himself, and levied a very fair contribution from the pockets of certain country gentlemen, who piqued themselves on understanding the antiquated tactics of Major A.; but never had the fortune before to measure trumps with an American. On the whole, he appeared remarkably comfortable and contented.

One morning I was honoured with an early domiciliary visit. "Fred," said my uncle, "put up half-a-dozen shirts and a tooth-brush. We start for Liverpool this evening."

"This evening!" said I in amazement. "Impossible, my dear sir! Only reflect – the Session is not over yet, and what would become of my business if I were to levant without notice?"

"I'll insure all your losses for a pound-note. Tell them you've got business elsewhere: I daresay a good many of the old hands are up to that trick already."

"But my engagements" – persisted I. "There's Mrs M'Crinoline's ball on Tuesday, and Lady M'Loup's the week after – really, uncle, I don't see how I can possibly get away."

"Do you wish to make your fortune, sir?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then do as I bid you. Get up and shave, and in the mean time I'll look after breakfast."

There was nothing for it but obedience, so I rose and polished my outer man. Mr Scripio was apparently in high feather and digestion. He put the finishing stroke to what had once been a prize mutton ham, and dug as diligently into a pot of marmalade as though he expected to find a layer of doubloons at the bottom. To my amazement, he dedicated his last cup of coffee as a special bumper to the health of the Noble President of the Board of Trade.

"What's in the wind now?" thought I. "Uncle, have you any thing dependent before Parliament? Perhaps you want a junior counsel for a bill."

"Confound Parliament!" said the irreverent Columbian; "I don't care a cent more for it than I do for Congress. The Board of Trade's the thing for my money! That's your constitutional tribunal – close-fitting boxes and Bramah locks – no humbug there! 'Zooks, won't we smash old Jobson after all!" and Scripio neighed like a Shetland pony at its first introduction to oats – all the while helping himself to a caulker of genuine Glenlivat.

We set off in the afternoon accordingly, and next morning arrived at Liverpool. Our stay there was very short. I was led captive to the Exchange, and hurried into a stockbroker's office in an obscure alley behind. The Plutus of this den, an old bald-pated gentleman, in a blue coat and drab terminations, started up from his seat as we entered, with more manifestations of respect than would have welcomed the avatar of the Cham of Tartary. Two consumptive clerks looked up with awe as they heard their master pronounce the venerated name of Dodger. It was clear that my uncle was well-known and appreciated here – his mere patronymic acted as a species of talisman.

We were conducted into an inner sanctum, where, having nothing else to do, I betook myself to the study of a map of England, where lines of railway already laid down in black, and projected ones in red, intersected the surface as closely as veins and arteries in an anatomical preparation. Mean

time, the two seniors entered into a deep, and apparently interesting conversation, the purport of which I did not very clearly understand.

"How's Dovers?" asked my uncle.

"Up. Forty to forty-two ex div.," replied the broker.

"Sell sixty. Bampton Watfords?"

"Rather better this morning."

"Good!" said Scripio, evidently gratified by the amendment of the interesting convalescent. "What's doing in the Slushpool Docks?"

"Heavy," replied the broker. "There's been a forced sale or two, but they won't go up."

"I should think not," said Scripio. "Have you bought me these forty Jamaicas?"

I started at the prodigality of the order. "Heaven and earth!" thought I, "can this uncle of mine be a kind of occidental Aladdin? After this, I should not be surprised to hear him bid for Texas and the Oregon territory!"

"I've got them," said the broker quietly; "they are going up without steam. Have you got any Biggleswades?"

"Yes," said my uncle, "what about them? No screw loose, eh? Sure to pass the standing orders, I hope?"

"All right," said the broker, "hold for the bill, and you'll make a good thing of it."

"Well, then," said my uncle, "that's all, and we're off. I'll write you from London about other matters. Good-day," – and we sallied into the street.

"Fred, you dog!" said Mr Dodger in high glee, "you've put your teeth into it this time."

"Into what, sir?" asked I, very innocently. "If you mean luncheon, I'm sure I should have no objections."

"Oh come! none of that humbug. I mean the Biggleswades. There hasn't been such a catch in Britain since the opening of the Coal-hill Junction."

"I'm devilish glad to hear it," said I, with a vague kind of general impression that I was going to make money, though I could not well tell how, and a fixed determination, since I *had* got my teeth in, to take as large a bite as possible, though, with regard to the process of mastication, I was just as ignorant as a baby. That afternoon we set off for Wales, and next day arrived at one of the most extraordinary households, in the southern extremity of the principality, which it ever was my fortune to visit.

The house was large and spacious, indeed a masterpiece of architecture, and probably had been built in the time of Charles the Second. It stood upon the slope of a hill, and immediately below were a succession of terraces, with walks of smooth green turf, and exotic shrubs, which in summer must be most luxuriant. It was winter when I visited at Mervyn Hall, but, even then, the terraces were beautiful. Every tree and spray was coated with armour of clear crystalline ice, except the thick old yew-hedge at the bottom, which kept its coat of dark perennial green. The Hall commanded the prospect of a large and fertile valley, diversified by wood and domain, tower and village spire; and in more than one place, a pillar of smoke, curling lazily upwards, marked the situation of a famous forge, or foundery. It was, in fact, one of the great iron districts, though you scarcely could have believed so by day; but at night, fire after fire seemed to burst out all down the reach of the valley; and probably years had gone by since the smallest of these was quenched. It is not often that nature lavishes her beauty and her wealth so prodigally upon the selfsame spot.

Uncle Scripio strode into the house with the air of a proprietor. I am not sure that he had not some interest in the concern, for Mervyn Hall was a kind of mystery to the neighbours. We were shown into a handsome apartment lined with black oak, where a regiment of cavaliers might have dined with both credit and satisfaction; but times had altered, and the banqueting-hall was now put to different uses. On two sofas and a table lay a pile of maps and plans, sufficient, according to my limited comprehension, for a survey of the whole world. Then there was an ingenious model of a

suspension bridge, where a railway of white-painted cord spanned a valley of undulating putty, with a stream in the centre, which bore evident marks of being ravished from a fractured looking-glass. Bundles of thick clumsy sticks – they might be instruments – with brass knobs at the top, like the morgenstern of a Norwegian watchman, were huddled into the corners. There was a grievous hole in the centre of the carpet; and several but-ends of cigars scattered on the mantelpiece, showed me very clearly that female domination was not acknowledged by the inhabitants of Mervyn Hall.

Our host, Mr Ginger, received us with great cordiality, and a flagon of superior ale. There are worse things under the skirts of Plinlimmon than the ancient *cwrw* of the Cymry. In five minutes the two gentlemen were deep in the discussion of certain disputed gradients, and my jaws were on the very verge of dislocation, when uncle Scripio, good-naturedly suggested that I might retire to another apartment.

"How many of the lads have you here just now, Ginger? I think Freddy had better step in and make their acquaintance."

Mr Ginger looked rather sour. "There's Gordon and Mackinnon working at the estimates, and William Cutts writing out the notices. I'm afraid they'll be disturbed."

"No fear of that," said I, too glad to make my escape on any terms; and accordingly, without further ceremony, I entered the adjoining study.

Mr Gordon, the senior engineer, as a sinewy-limbed fellow of some three-and-thirty, whose countenance and complexion bore satisfactory evidence of a pure Caledonian extraction. He was considered by his scientific brethren as a kind of engineering Robert the Devil, having performed various feats with the theodolite which were the marvel of the whole fraternity. If any old gentleman was foolish enough to object to a proposed line on account of its traversing his garden or preserve, or invading the sanctity of his pig-stys, Gordon was instantly sent for. No sooner were the stars out, as also the lights in the mansion-house, than, on the verge of the disputed territory, an accurate observer might have described something like the glimmer of a glow-worm advancing stealthily forwards. That was Master Gordon, with his lantern, staff, and chain; and before the grey dawn of morning, the whole gradients were booked and ready for the most searching inspection of a committee of the House of Commons. It is even alleged that, despite the enmity of a northern thane, this Protean Archimedes surveyed a Highland line with nothing but his leister, or salmon-spear, and actually killed three fish whilst ascertaining the practicability of a cutting through a tremendous Pass. Be this as it may, he was certainly a clever fellow, and as ugly a customer as a keeper could cope withal before the dew had vanished from the clover. Mackinnon was a quiet-looking lad, with a latent dash of the daredevil; proud of his name and of his genealogy, and maintaining some show of a Highland gentleman's dignity, in a following of three ragged Skye terriers, who yelped incessantly at his heels. Cutts was a grand specimen of the Londoner, redolent of the Fives' Court and Evans's; one of those fellows whom it is very desirable to have on your side in a row, and very unpleasant to encounter if you happen to be particular about the colour and symmetry of your eyes. With these gentlemen I speedily became hand in glove, and the afternoon passed rapidly away. It may be questionable, however, whether the accuracy of the estimates was improved by the introduction of cigars, and a pitcher of the Welsh home-brewed.

After dinner, we all got remarkably merry. Mr Dodger related, in his happiest manner, several anecdotes of the way in which he had "flummox'd" old Jobson, his arch-enemy and railway rival; Mr Ginger favoured us with an imitation of a locomotive train, perfect even to the painful intensity of the whistle; and Gordon told, with great gusto, various miraculous adventures, which might have done honour to a Borderer in the good old days of "lifting." Somehow or other, as the evening got on, we became confoundedly national. The Scotch, of course, being the majority, had decidedly the best of it; and the American Scripio and Cambrian Ginger having joined our ranks, we all fell foul of the unfortunate Cutts, and abused everything Anglican as heartily as O'Connell upon the hill of Tara. We soon succeeded in extorting an admission, that the Scots, upon the whole, had rather the

best of it at Flodden; and thereupon, and ever thereafter, Mr Cutts was accosted by the endearing epithet of Saxon, presently abbreviated, for the sake of euphony, into Sacks. I don't exactly recollect at what hour we retired to bed.

"Freddy," said my uncle next morning, "I am going off to London with Mr Ginger; and I don't think you could do better than remain where you are. You'd be sure to get into no end of scrapes in town; and I haven't time to be continually bailing you out of Bow Street."

"Very well, sir; just as you please. I dare say, I shall manage to make myself quite comfortable here."

"I say, though," remonstrated Mr Ginger, "he'll keep the whole of the lads from their work. Gordon is too fond of fun at any time; and the moment our backs are turned, they'll be after some devilry or other. Couldn't your nephew carry a theodolite, and take a few practical lessons in surveying?"

"Lord help you!" said my uncle, "he's as innocent of mensuration as an infant. Can't you spare Cutts?"

"Better than the other two, certainly."

"Well, then, we'll hand over Freddy to him; and let them amuse themselves the best way they can. Cutts, you may do what you like for the next ten days; but, remember, Gordon and Mackinnon are not to be disturbed on any account. Now, good-by, and take care of yourselves."

The Saxon and I made ample use of the permission. We established our headquarters at the Saracen in Shrewsbury, and went the pace for some days at a hand-gallop. I can't help laughing, even now, at the consternation into which South Wales was thrown by the re-appearance of Rebecca and her daughters, who carried off, in one night, seven turnpike-gates. It was a pity that the London journals should have been at the expense of sending down special correspondents on that occasion; for I can bear personal testimony to the fact, that no country could possibly be quieter. Even the tollkeepers appeared to slumber with a tenfold torpedo power. A little incident, however, soon occurred, which completely changed the nature of my occupations.

I went, one day, to call upon a family who resided some miles from Shrewsbury. It was a visit of ceremony; and I therefore considered it a bore. Cutts, who was no lady's man, preferred waiting for me at a neighbouring public-house; so I effected my *entrée* alone. I went in a free-man; and came out, two hours afterwards, as complete a bond-slave as ever hoed the sugar-canes of Cupid. A pair of laughing blue eyes, and the prettiest lips in the universe, had undone me. Sweet Mary Morgan! yours was a rapid conquest! and – you need not pinch my ears.

I went down to the inn in that state of pleasing bewilderment which characterises the first stage of the amatory complaint. Cutts had got tired in my absence; and, being rather in a pensive mood, had gone to the church-yard with a quart of beer, where I found him copying the inscriptions on the tombstones.

"What the devil kept you so long?" said the Saxon.

"Hold your tongue, Sacks! I have just seen the prettiest angel! Who on earth can she be? No relation, I dare be sworn, of that fat old rascal Owenson."

"Whew! that's the sort of thing, is it?" quoth Cutts. "What may be the name of the divinity?"

"Mary Morgan."

"What? little Mary! Oh yes! I know her very well," said the Saxon. "She's the daughter of the principal medical man in Shrewsbury; a pompous old blockhead, with twenty thousand pounds and a pigtail. Mary is a sweet little creature; and, between you and me, I rather flatter myself I have made an impression in that quarter. You have no idea how she laughed when I danced the fetter hornpipe at the Jones's."

"Sacks," said I quietly, "if you dare to mention that young lady's name in connexion with yourself again, I shall knock out your brains on the nearest monument. I am perfectly serious. Now listen – how can I get an introduction to the doctor?"

"It won't do, old fellow, if you have a complaint of the chest."

"How so?"

"The phlebotomizing Jew swears he won't marry his daughter to any man who is not as rich as himself. But I'll tell you what it is, Fred. – You are a confoundedly good fellow, though you *are* a descendant of William the Lion, which I consider to be utter gammon, and I don't care if I lend you a helping hand. Miss Morgan is very intimate with Letty Jones, who is a nice larking girl, and understands how to manage her mamma. I'll arrange a quiet tea-party there to-morrow evening, and you may make love as long as you like, provided you don't interfere with supper."

No arrangement could possibly have pleased me better. The Saxon was as good as his word; and after an early dinner, at which I tyrannously curtailed my friend of his usual allowance of liquor, we made our way to the Jonesian habitation.

Cutts, very good-naturedly, took the whole task of amusing the company upon himself. He gave pantomimic representations of T. P. Cooke and Taglioni, sang half-a-dozen songs that are nightly encored at the Surrey side, and finally performed a series of antique statues in his shirt-sleeves. For myself, I was far too agreeably occupied to pay much attention to his masterpiece of "Ajax defying the Lightning." Mary Morgan was prettier and more fascinating than ever, and before supper was announced, I had made considerable progress. I saw her home, and made an appointment for next day to visit a ruin in the neighbourhood. Cutts was rewarded for his good behaviour by three extra tumblers of brandy and water at the Saracen, and became so affectionate that I had much difficulty in making my escape to bed.

I shall pass over, without condescending upon minute particulars, the history of the ensuing week. Love-making is always pleasant; certainly more so in summer than in winter, but there is a strange alchemy in the tender passion, which, despite of frost and snow, can endow all nature with the hues and odours of spring. So, at least, it was with me. I met my charmer every day, and at length succeeded in extorting from her lips the only confession, to obtain which the labour of years is but a trifling sacrifice. What a pleasant thing it would be, if, in those matters, there was nothing more to consult than the inclinations of the parties who are principally concerned! What, in the name of cross-purposes, have parents to do with controlling the affections of their children? Thirty years ago, there is not one of them who would have submitted patiently to the dictation which they now exercise without scruple. I sometimes wonder whether, twenty years after this, I shall continue of the same opinion; but, thank heaven, there is ample time for consideration – Poor dear little Jemima is only cutting her teeth.

Mary was quite alive to the difficulties which stood in her way. Old Morgan loved her, it is true; but it was that sort of love which antiquarians and coin-collectors have for their rarest specimens – they cannot bear to see them for a moment in the hands of others. Wealth alone could bribe the doctor to part with his child, and, alas! of that I had little or nothing. True, I might be considered as uncle Dodger's prospective heir; but that esteemed gentleman was as tough as India-rubber, and very nearly as good a life as my own. Professional prospects – ahem! – they might do to talk about in Wales; certainly not in Edinburgh, where few lawyers are accounted prophets.

In this dilemma, I resolved to take sweet counsel with the Saxon, having no one else to apply to. As I had neglected him horribly for the last few days, he was rather sulky, until I gave him to understand that I was in downright earnest. Then you may be sure he brightened up amazingly. There was mischief evidently in the wind.

"That comes of your confounded Scotch education," said Cutts, interrupting a very pretty speech of mine about honourable conduct and disinterested motives. "Who doubts that you are perfectly disinterested? Of course it's the girl, and not the money you want. She *does* happen to have twenty thousand, but you don't care about that – you would marry her without a shilling, wouldn't you?"

"By the bones of King David the First" —

"That's enough. Don't disturb the repose of the respectable old gentleman – he might not be over happy if he saw his descendant in breeches. The case seems clear enough; I wonder you have a doubt about it. Old Morgan won't give his consent, so there is absolute necessity for a bolt. Leave it all to me. I'll provide a chaise and four, and if the lady has no objection, we can start to-morrow evening. I'll sit behind on the rumble, and shoot the leader if there should be any pursuit. Only mind this, I don't go unless there is a lady's maid. Every thing must be done with strict regard to decorum."

"Is the lady's maid also to occupy the rumble?"

"Of course. You wouldn't have her inside, would you? Come now, set about it, like a good fellow. It will be a first-rate lark, and you may command me at an hour's notice."

I confess that I felt very much inclined to adopt the suggestion of the Saxon. Most men, I believe, are averse to elopements as a general principle; but there are always exceptions, as every one discovers when his own wishes are thwarted. I was not destined, however, to offer my hymeneal sacrifice at the shrine of the Gretna Pluto. A letter of mine to Mary, rather amorously worded, found its way into the hands of Doctor Morgan. The usual consequences followed – an explosion of paternal wrath, filial incarceration, and the polite message to myself, that if I ventured to approach the house, it would be at the risk of appropriating the contents of a blunderbuss. My feelings may be easily imagined.

"If you amuse yourself that way with your hair," said my friend and consoler Cutts, "you'll have to buy a wig, and that costs money. Hang it, man, cheer up! We'll do the old boy yet. Mackinnon will be here to-night, and the deuce is in it if three clever fellows like us can't outwit a Welsh apothecary."

I assisted at that evening's conference, which was conducted with due solemnity. We smoked a great deal, after the manner of an Indian war-council, and circulated "the fire-water of the pale-face" rather rapidly. Both my friends were clearly of opinion that our honour was at stake. They vowed that, having gone so far, it was imperative to carry off the lady, and pledged their professional reputation upon a successful issue. Cutts had learned that on the following Friday there was to be a great ball in Shrewsbury; and, through the medium of Letty Jones, he understood that Mary Morgan and her father were to be there. This seemed a golden opportunity. It was finally arranged that I should withdraw myself from the neighbourhood in the mean time, but return on the evening of the ball, and conceal myself in a private apartment of the Saracen, where the ball was to be held. Mackinnon was to attend the ball, and lead Mary to the supper-room, from which the retreat could be easily effected. Cutts was to remain below, look after the horses, and act as general spy. Nothing more seemed necessary than to make Miss Morgan aware of our plans; which the Saxon undertook to do by agency of his fair and larking friend, who was in perfect ecstasies at the prospect of this coming elopement.

The eventful Friday arrived; and from a solitary bed-room in the third floor of the Saracen, I heard the caterwauling of fiddles announce the opening of the ball. I had asked Cutts to take a quiet chop with me up-stairs, but that mercurial gentleman positively refused, upon the ground of expediency. Nothing on earth could induce him to leave his post. He was to act the spy, and therefore it was absolutely necessary that he should remain below. All my remonstrances could not prevent him from dining with Mackinnon in the coffee-room; so I was compelled to give him his own way, merely extracting a pledge that for this once he would abstain from unbounded potations. Down went the two gentlemen, and I was left alone to my solitary meditations.

I have read Victor Hugo's *Dernier Jour d'un Condamné*, but I do not recollect, in the course of my literary researches, having met with any accurate journal of a gentleman's sensations before perpetrating an elopement. It is a thing that could easily be done at a moment's notice, but the case seems very different after the calm contemplation of a week. You begin, then, to calculate the results. Fancy takes a leap beyond the honeymoon, and dim apparitions of bakers' bills, and the skeletons of cheap furniture, obtrude themselves involuntarily on your view. I lay down on the bed, and tried to sleep until I should receive the appointed signal. For some time it would not do. The nightmare, in the form of a nurse with ponderous twins, sat deliberately down upon my chest, and requested one of them, a hideous red-haired little imp, to kiss its dear Papa! At last, however, I succeeded.

In the mean time Messrs Cutts and Mackinnon sat down to their frugal banquet in the coffee-room. A glass of sherry after soup is allowed to the merest anchorite, therefore my friends opined that they could not do less than order a bottle. After fish, Mackinnon discovered that he was in very low spirits – a dismal foreboding had haunted him all forenoon; and as it would not do to betray any depression in the ball-room, he rather thought that a flask of champagne would alleviate his melancholy symptoms. The Saxon loved his ally too much to interpose any objections, so the cork of the Sillery was started. A jug of ale during dinner, and a pint of port after cheese, were fair and legitimate indulgences; and these being discussed, Cutts proceeded to the stable to look after the horses. All was right; and after an affecting exhortation to the postilions to keep themselves rigidly sober, the Saxon rejoined his friend.

"It is a great relief to my mind, Mackinnon," said Cutts, throwing himself back in his chair, and exposing his feet to the comfortable radiance of the fire, "to think that matters are likely to go on swimmingly. It's a fine frosty starlight night – just the sort of weather you would select for a bolt; and Freddy and his dove will be as comfortable inside the chaise as if they were in cotton."

"Rather cold, though, on the rumble," replied Mackinnon.

"Gad, you're right," said the Saxon. "I say, don't you think, since I'm good-natured enough to expose myself in that way, we might have a bottle of mulled port just by way of fortifier?"

"You're a devilish sensible fellow, Cutts," said Mackinnon; and he rang the bell.

"Won't it be rare fun!" said Sacks, helping himself to a rummer of the reeking fluid. "Think what a jolly scamper we shall have. The horses' feet ringing like metal as they tear full gallop along the road, and old Morgan in a buggy behind, swearing like an incarnate demon! Mac, here's your good health; you're a capital fellow. Give us a song, old chap! I won't see you again for three weeks at the soonest. My eyes! what a rage Ginger will be in!"

Mackinnon was of a Jacobite family who had rather burned their fingers in the Forty-five, and being also somewhat of a sentimental turn, he invariably became lachrymose over his liquor, and poured out the passion of his soul in lamentations over the fall of the Stuarts. Instead, therefore, of favouring Cutts with any congenial ditty from the Coal-hole or Cider-cellar, he struck up "Drumossie muir, Drumossie day," in a style that would have drawn tears from an Edinburgh ticket-porter. Sacks, without having any distinct idea of the period of history to which the ballad referred, pronounced it to be deuced touching; whereupon Mackinnon commenced a eulogy on the clans in general, and his own sept in particular.

"Ay, that must have been a pleasant fellow," said Cutts, in response to a legend of Mackinnon's, concerning a remote progenitor known by the *sobriquet* of Angus with the bloody whiskers; "a little too ready with his knife perhaps, but a lively companion, I daresay, over a joint of his neighbour's beef. 'Pon my soul, it's quite delightful to hear you talk, Mackinnon; as good as reading one of Burns's novels. Just ring the bell, will you, for another jug; and then tell me the story of your great ancestor who killed the Earl of Northumberland."

This adroit stroke of the Saxon, whose thirst in reality was for liquor, not for lore, proved perfectly irresistible. Mackinnon went on lying like a Sennachie, and by the time the second jug was emptied, both gentlemen were just tottering on the verge of inebriation. The sound of the music in the apartment above first recalled Mackinnon to the sense of his duties.

"I say though, Cutts, I must be off now. I'll bring the girl down to supper, and Freddy will take her off my hands at the door; isn't that the agreement? Faith, though, I'll have a waltz with her first. I hope there's no smell of port-wine about me. It won't do for a ball-room."

"Try a glass of brandy," said Cutts, and he administered the potation. "Now you be off, and I'll keep a sharp look-out below."

The Saxon's ideas of a look-out were rather original. In the first place he paid a visit to the bar, where the niece of the landlady – a perfect little Hebe – presided, and varied the charms of a flirtation with a modicum of brandy and water. He then returned to the coffee-room, in which were

two gentlemen who had seceded for a moment from the ball. They were both very accurately dressed, proud of French polish, white cravats, and lemon-coloured gloves, and altogether seemed to consider themselves as the finished D'Orsays, of Shrewsbury. A few supercilious looks, which they vouchsafed upon Cutts, who, to say the truth, was no beauty in his shooting-jacket, roused the Saxon lion. Some complimentary expressions passed between the parties, which ended in an offer from Cutts to fight both gentlemen for a five-pound note; or, if they had not so much ready cash, to accommodate them with a thrashing on credit. This proposal was magnanimously declined by the strangers, who edged gradually towards the door; however, nothing, but the arrival of several waiters, who recognised, from frequent practice, the incipient symptoms of a row, could have prevented some little display of pugilistic science. The temper of Cutts was, of course, a little ruffled by the encounter, and, in order to restore his mind to its usual equilibrium, he treated himself to another soother, and then ascended the stairs to see what I was doing. By that time it was late in the evening.

A tremendous slap on the shoulder roused me from my dreams. I started up, and there, to my amazement, was Cutts sitting upon the bed with a fresh-lighted cigar in his mouth, puffing as vigorously as an engine.

"Good heavens, Cutts!" cried I, "what is the matter? I hope nothing has gone wrong? Where's Mary?"

"All right, old fellow," said the Saxon with a mysterious smile. "We've plenty time yet for another glass of brandy and water."

"Surely, Cutts, you can't have been making a beast of yourself!" and I seized a candle. There could be no doubt of the fact: he was very fearfully disguised.

"That I should have trusted myself in the hands of such a jackass!" was my first exclamation. "Leave the room this moment, sir, or I shall knock you down with a chair; and never let me see your disgusting countenance again."

"Did you apply those epi – epitaphs to me, sir?" said the Saxon, with an abortive attempt to look dignified. "You shall hear from me in the morning. This is an ungrateful world – very! I've been doing all I can for him, keeping all the liquor out of the postilions – and that is my reward! I can't help it," continued Cutts, lapsing into a melodramatic reminiscence of the *Adelphi* – "so I'll just belay my pipe. Bless my dear eyes – how came the salt-water here? Hold hard, old boy, – no snivelling!" and he drew the back of his hand across his eyes, as if he was parting from a messmate upon the eve of execution.

"This is intolerable!" I cried. "Get out, sir, or I shall throw you over the window!"

"Like to see you try it," said Cutts with a *Coriolanus* air of defiance. I had just enough command over myself to see that a row with the Saxon was worse than useless, as it would effectually destroy my last remaining chance. I therefore changed my plans.

"Mark me, sir. I am going to ring the bell for the waiters, and if you don't choose to relieve me of your presence at once, they shall have my orders to carry you down stairs. Will you go, sir? No! then take the consequences;" and I rang the bell like a demoniac.

The music stopped in the room below. Cutts, drunk as he was, observed the circumstance; and no sooner were steps heard upon the stairs, in obedience to the tocsin, than he took his departure with the candle. I lay down again till the tumult should subside, when I intended to apprise Mackinnon of the present state of matters.

My appeal to the bell, which was a vigorous one, had produced a marked effect. Several of the company had come to the door of the ball-room, in order to learn the true nature of the alarm; and Cutts on his descent was assailed by vehement enquiries.

"Oh, don't ask me – don't ask me!" said the villain, wringing his hands like a male *Antigone*. "My poor friend! he's just going! Oh, gentlemen, is there no medical man here to save him?"

"Doctor Morgan! Doctor Morgan!" shouted twenty voices.

"Bless my soul, what's the matter here?" said the doctor, emerging from the ball-room. "Any body taken suddenly ill, eh?"

"Oh, my poor friend!" groaned the traitor.

"Mercy on me! is it so bad as that?" said the Doctor, "I must see him immediately. My dear sir, what *is* the matter with your friend?"

"His head, sir – his head!" said Cutts with a sob – "he is quite mad at the present moment. If you go up-stairs to No. 3, you'll find him biting the bed-posts!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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