

THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Report

of

Committee on Examination

This is to certify that we the undersigned, as a committee of the Graduate School, have given Clifford Arthur Bender final oral examination for the degree of

Master of Arts

We recommend that the degree of

Master of Arts

be conferred upon the candidate.

C. A. Moore

Chairman

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Keup Malone

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Date May 22, 1923

THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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Report  
of  
Committee on Thesis

The undersigned, acting as a Committee of the Graduate School, have read the accompanying thesis submitted by Clifford Arthur Bender for the degree of Master of Arts. They approve it as a thesis meeting the requirements of the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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*May 22* 1918<sup>23.</sup>

THE LABOR PROBLEM IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of Minnesota

by

Clifford Arthur Bender

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

June 1923

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THE LABOR PROBLEM IN THE AMERICAN NOVEL

by

Clifford A. Bender

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the functions of an introduction, I suppose, is to warn the reader what to expect and what not to expect. He may expect in the following pages a fairly thorough account of the nineteenth century, but a very fragmentary one of the twentieth. The twentieth century has in it enough material for another complete thesis; I have merely attempted to skim off a little of the cream. As for the plan of my work, I have arranged the novels in the order of their publication in order to facilitate the making of connections between them and contemporary developments in the world. I have, of course, given some account of the development of the labor problem itself, outside the novel; no work of this kind would be intelligible without it. The novel of the labor problem has, it seems to me, undergone a definite evolution along with the problem itself. I have attempted to trace that evolution.

There are two aspects to every novel: what it has to say, and how it says it. Hence I have treated each writer both as an analyst of the labor problem and as an artist. I have tried to point out in each case what qualities are distinctive; and I have also made some attempt to criticize and evaluate. I must admit, however, that my criticism is primarily destructive rather than constructive. I have pointed out certain phases of the labor problem, for instance, which a certain writer fails to explain; but I have not myself tried to explain them.

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CHAPTER I  
BEFORE THE WAR

1 - The Labor Problem

The labor problem had begun to manifest itself in the United States long before the Civil War. It grew along with the growth of the factory system of production, and much of the production ~~of~~ in America, especially in New England, was carried on by the factory system long before 1861. The period from 1825 to 1837 marked the organization throughout the New England states of trade unions. Naturally the new unions gave rise to a certain number of strikes - some of them successful. Thus as early as 1825 the struggle between capital and labor was on, but it was rather an amateurish performance. The onlookers may have been amused, but the probability is that they were not greatly excited. It was not until after the war that the struggle became intense.

The native American labor problem seems to have attracted little attention. The population of America, however, was being continually augmented from Europe, and in Europe the problem had already become a vital issue. The labor problem was imported to America with the European immigrants. Many of these were not content to regard America merely as an escape from the economic injustice of the old world, but wished to use it as a laboratory in which they might experiment with ideal commonwealths. As early as 1776 a communistic village was founded by the Society of the Shakers at Watervliet, New York. This was followed before 1825 by various other experiments of similar nature, chief among them being that of the Rappists at Harmony, Pennsylvania, and that of the Zoarites in Tuscarawa County, Ohio. These earliest experiments in communism were not outgrowths of the labor problem. The Shakers, Rappists, and Zoarites were religious sectarians. They had no desire to

reform the world, wishing only to be let alone in the observance of their own particular religion. As it happened, their religion involved communistic living.

After 1825 America became the scene of various communistic experiments that were more or less direct outgrowths of the European labor problem - the experiments, namely, of the Owenites, the Fourierists, and the Icarians ( followers of Etienne Cabet).\* Unlike the sectarians, the new communists regarded their experiments as steps in the reorganization of society as a whole. It was their idea that if the communities were successful the countries of the world would profit by their example, and reorganize on the communistic plan. Hence, unlike the sectarians, they wished to call the attention of the world to their projects, for naturally the world could not be expected to profit by an example it was not aware existed. Thus the establishment of the new communities was accompanied by a certain amount of propaganda. Owen, for instance, did a great deal of public speaking. He was heard not only by the general public, but by presidents and congressmen as well: "At Washington he delivered several lectures in the Hall of Representatives before the President, the President-elect, all the judges of the United States Supreme Court, and a great number of Senators and Congressmen."\*\* Further than this, there were papers and magazines devoted to the propaga of the new communism.

The experiments following the year 1825, although they were outgrowths of the labor problem, were premature developments. Their sponsors are known to modern times as "naive" communists, because of the simple faith they had in their ability to reorganize society

\* The one among them that attracted the most attention was the  
Fourieristic experiment at Brook Farm.

\*\* Hillquit - History of Socialism - Revised - p 54

through social invention and experiment without taking cognizance of the fixed laws of social evolution. Communistic theory did not reach its full development until the publication in 1848 of the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels. This document contained, in addition to its ultimate hypothetical solution of the labor problem through the common ownership of the means of production, an explanation of social evolution on the basis of the materialistic interpretation of history, and a plan of action based on the assumption that the problem might never be solved except through the uncompromising struggle for power of the united working class against the capitalists. Pure Marxism was not represented in America until after the war. Between the "naive" socialists and Marx, however, came Wilhelm Weitling, a German radical who published in 1838 a book entitled "The World as It Is, and as It Should Be". Weitling was a connecting link between primitive and modern socialism. He differed from the earlier socialists in specifically recognizing the class struggle as such, but his doctrine was by no means as complete and clear-cut as that of Marx. Weitling visited the United States in 1846, and in 1849 he came back to stay. He proceeded to disseminate his theories among the German immigrants, many of whom were radicals who had taken part in the German revolutions of 1830 and 1848. In 1850 he founded among the Germans in New York the General Workingmen's League. Besides this league of Weitling's there were among the German immigrants of New York before the Civil War two other socialistic organizations of the more modern type: the Union of the Turnvereine, <sup>(Gymnastic societies with socialistic leanings)</sup> established in 1851, and the Communist Club, organized in 1857.

There was plenty of imported socialism in America before 1861, but the native labor problem was not sufficiently acute to cause that socialism to take root among the rank and file. With a

few exceptions, like the transcendental communists of Brook Farm, the only people in America who seriously concerned themselves with imported socialism were the imported socialists.

## 2 - The Novel

American novels dealing directly with the labor problem before the Civil War simply did not exist; one would not go far astray in representing their exact number by a zero. Even indirect references to the problem are scarce. Leaving out of consideration the literature of the slave problem, which might by a perilous stretch of the imagination be conceived of as having something to do with the subject, the novels that refer to the problem even indirectly are limited almost exclusively to certain mildly Cooperesque tales of adventure. Woolman had remarked in his Journal as early as 1772 concerning the abject condition of sailors arising from the avarice of ship owners.\* Certain novels of the middle eighties have something to say about this. There are references to the subject in Dana's "Two Years Before the Mast" (1840), in Melville's "Typee" (1845), and in "Kaloolah" (1849), by William Starbuck Mayo; and in 1850 Melville's "White Jacket" created <sup>an interest in</sup> ~~a furor~~ concerning the evils of corporal punishment in the United States Navy sufficient to inspire the enacting of a law abolishing it. Of course no one but an adept in the use of medieval logic could possibly discover any but the remotest connection between punishment in the navy and the labor problem. I mention the matter merely to show how remote was the connection between the labor problem and the novel of the middle eighties.

Besides the references to the hardships of sailors there are in three novels of the time vague echoes of communism. There are

\* Pattee - Century Readings in American Literature - pp 59 - 60

in "Typee", for instance, certain comparisons between the primitive communism of the Typees and the civilization of the United States - comparisons not always favorable to the United States. Then, of course, the story of Hawthorne's "Blithedale Romance" (1852) was suggested by the author's experiences at Brook Farm, although the book has very little to do with the labor problem. Finally, there is in "Kaloolah" a brief description of a Utopian kingdom in Africa. "Kaloolah" is probably the first Utopian novel in the literature of America, but that does not mean that it has much to do with the labor problem. The sub-title of "Kaloolah" is "The Adventures of Jonathan Romer of Nantucket". Mayo was concerned primarily with narrating the travels of his hero, most of them in Africa. It happens, however, that the hero meets in the Congo a certain girl of almost white skin, a princess, who has been sold accidentally into slavery. The hero buys her freedom. Later he discovers that her father rules an unknown kingdom of very high civilization, a Utopian kingdom if you please, in the interior of Africa. Toward the end of the tale Romer visits this kingdom and gives some account of it. Mayo's account of Utopia can hardly be looked upon as a contribution to the literature of the labor problem, because it is not done in a serious vein. It makes one suspect that the author was gently poking fun at the Owenites and the Brook Farmers; yet it is not exactly satirical, but rather in the clownish spirit of Rabelais. Take for example the account of the determination of social rank. Rank depends neither upon heredity nor upon wealth. When a woman wants to raise her social position she gives notice to the proper official, and the matter is submitted to a vote of her friends. If the vote is favorable she is examined by the Board of Commissioners of Position, and if the examination is also favorable she is admitted to

the caste for which she is a candidate. A woman's caste is always indicated by a colored button she wears upon her breast. Commenting upon this system, the author says: "The advantages of this custom are apparent. The position of everyone is, for the time, fixed, and there is consequently none of that jealous fear, lest it be compromised, which obtains in some countries. It allows much greater liberty of social intercourse, inasmuch as a red medal can be seen talking to a green medal, or even smelling at the same bouquet, without any apprehension of losing caste."\* Although "Kaloolah" contains several pointed comments, one gets the impression that <sup>for the most part</sup> the author was merely amusing himself with the random and imperfectly integrated creations of his own fancy.

The failure of American novelists during this time to interest themselves in the labor problem was partly due, certainly, to the fact that the question of negro slavery eclipsed every other issue. Both the German socialists and the Brook Farmers carried on anti-slavery agitation. The slave problem, in other words, distracted the attention even of those one would expect to have concerned themselves most exclusively with the problem of labor. Then, in addition to this, while the <sup>serious</sup> ~~bona fide~~ treatment of the labor problem usually involves some approach to a realistic method, the tradition of the novel at this time was not realistic. Hence a labor problem novel before the Civil War would have involved a rebellion against literary tradition. After all, literary traditions are tenacious.

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\* p 467

CHAPTER II  
DEFINITE BEGINNINGS

1 - Introduction

Before the Civil War the labor problem was not acute because the factory system which breeds the labor problem had by no means reached its full development. It took the war itself to make out of America an industrial country of the first rank. Before the industrial magnates could get control of the country it was necessary that they put an end to the opposition of the landed aristocracy of the South. Whenever the capitalists of the North wished to place a high import duty on manufactures, the Southern aristocracy, wishing to buy cotton clothing for their slaves as cheaply as possible, objected. This sort of thing had to be stopped; so the Northern manufacturers were in favor of the Civil War, or perhaps it would be better to say that they were in favor of overcoming the opposition of the planters, and that physical force was the only method by which the planters would allow them to do it. Thus the war itself, if it was primarily humanitarian, was certainly secondarily commercial. It marked the removal of the one great obstacle impeding the development of the factory system.

Immediately after the war America entered upon a hectic period of money-getting. The contrast between the humanitarian enthusiasm of 1860 and the mercenary preoccupation of, say, 1868, between the slow-moving production of 1860 and the feverish exploitation of resources in 1868, is probably the greatest contrast in American history. Industry was greatly stimulated not only by the final dethronement of the planters, but also by certain circumstances arising directly out of the war itself. The North, for example, had felt during the war the need of money. For the purpose

of getting this money the government had enacted an extraordinarily high tariff on manufactures. This tariff acted as a stimulus to production. Further than this, the necessity for keeping production up to normal while at the same time sending to war a great many men who had formerly been agents of production caused manufacturers to install new labor-saving machinery. The necessity for transporting troops and supplies, furthermore, gave rise to an unprecedented railroad boom. All of these things had their effect upon the progress of the country after the war. Railroads continued to be built. The machinery installed during the war continued to be used. And the manufacturing capitalists and the owners of natural resources, now in complete control of the situation, saw to it that the high tariff was kept in operation. This they did through the agency of their own party, the Republican Party, which for many years after the war was as thoroughly corrupt as possible. This party, along with its advocacy of the high tariff, took its stand in favor of unrestricted immigration. It was intent, in other words, upon securing for the capitalists not only an exclusive home market for their goods, but also a glutted labor market, which would make it unnecessary for them to pay out too large a share of their profits in wages.

The unrestricted immigration policy brought to the country, in addition to the Chinese laborers who were employed on the railroads, a great many Europeans who had emigrated from their native lands on account of political and economic disaffection. These furnished fertile soil for the propaganda of Marxism. The year 1864 marked the organization in London of the International Working-men's League, which was dominated by Marx himself. The influence of this league in America was exerted principally through the General German

\* Now that the Democrats were looked upon with disfavor as the party of secession, it could retain control in spite of its corruption.

Labor Association, which evolved by slow degrees into the Socialist Labor Party, christened in 1877.

While the radicals from the various parts of Europe were getting together and arriving at mutual understandings, the American trades unions were organizing on a national scale. In 1871 occurred a series of strikes, the most important of which was the strike of the Pennsylvania coal miners. In 1873 came the Northern Pacific Panic. In the first days of 1874 gigantic unemployment parades were organized in the larger cities, especially in Chicago and New York. The New York parade was stampeded by the police. The Northern Pacific Panic was by no means a matter of months; it lasted five years, and the worst year was 1877. The destitution prevailing in the year 1877 was greater than it had ever been before. Police stations were crowded with homeless men trying to find a corner to sleep in. Men and women begged to be sent to the workhouse, because there they would be fed. In the midst of all this the railroad men struck against a twenty-five per cent. decrease in wages. Their strike was the most extensive up to its time. It seems to have taken the country unprepared - so unprepared that in many places the strikers temporarily gained complete control of the situation. It was a time of militia activity and rioting.

In the strikes and in the unemployment demonstrations the socialists were very active. They were handicapped, however, by the circumstance that most of them were foreigners and also by the circumstance that they could offer at that time no very definite plan of action. Whatever influence they had, furthermore, was short-lived. The year 1878 marked the end of the crisis, and the men went back to work and forgot about socialism. The panic years of the seventies were turbulent years and they were years of misery. They

served to print endelibly upon the public mind the idea that there was a labor problem and that that problem was not lightly to be put aside. That was all. As far as any real contribution to the solution of the problem was concerned, the seventies were not equal to the situation. The period was one of blind striving.

## 2 - "The Stillwater Tragedy"

The introduction of the labor problem into the novel did not take place immediately after the war. The period from 1861 to 1868, as far as literary production was concerned, was very fallow. The decade following 1868 was the *initial* decade of the local colorists. Whitman's prophe<sup>s</sup>y of a literature of the people was beginning to be fulfilled.\* The decade marked a breaking away from the New England traditions and the opening up to literature of an unlimited range of subject matter that had formerly been either unnoticed or taboo. It marked the treatment in literature of the common man as he actually was, especially if the common man happened to be eccentric or picturesque. It did not mark the introduction into literature of the labor problem.

What seems to be the first American novel mentioning the labor problem as such is "The Stillwater Tragedy" by Thomas <sup>Bailey</sup> ~~Exillyx~~ Aldrich, which was accepted in 1880 by William Dean Howells for serial publication in the Atlantic.

That Aldrich should have been the one to introduce the labor problem into the novel can be explained only by the circumstance that Aldrich was above everything else a literary innovator. He introduced the bad boy; he made fashionable the surprise ending; in "The Stillwater Tragedy" itself he makes quite a <sup>considerable</sup> contribution to the genus detective novel; and finally, he introduced the labor problem.

\* See Whitman's "Democratic Vistas" (1871)

I say that Aldrich's itch for innovation is the only reason that may be assigned for his treatment of the labor problem, because Aldrich would seem to have been one of the last men in the world to have a natural interest in the problem itself. The fact that he was not vitally interested in it is evident from the manner in which he treats it. It is evident also from the circumstance that neither of his two principal biographers, his wife and Mr. Ferris Greenslet, mentions the fact that he ever realized such a problem existed. A man who spends his youth in the atmosphere of exotic poetry, his best years as a literary critic and a writer of artificial verse, and his later years as an editor of literary periodicals and a European traveller, is not the man one expects to pick up the gauntlet in unaesthetic controversy. As a matter of fact, Aldrich did not exactly pick up the gauntlet; he allowed the problem to lie pretty much where it was in the first place, merely calling attention to the fact that it was lying there.

"The Stillwater Tragedy" is a mystery story, with the usual love plot and the labor problem thrown in. Its setting is a New England town, the type that is neither small enough to be called a village nor large enough to be called a city. The principal industries of Stillwater are the manufacture of cotton, iron, and marble products. Stillwater may have been modeled after Aldrich's own home town, Portsmouth, New Hampshire; Portsmouth was a cotton-manufacturing town and it is not at all unlikely that it also contained a marble yard. The story, exclusive of the love plot, is somewhat as follows. Richard Shackford, returning from the sea, is employed as designer at the Slocum marble yard. Later he rises to the position of general manager. His rapid rise excites the envy of his erstwhile friend, the marble cutter William Durgin. A quarrel in the yard

excited the enmity of Torinni, an Italian carver who has a habit of getting drunk and delivering orations on the subject of workmen's rights. Then occurs the strike; then the settlement; then the murder of Richard's uncle; then the fixing of suspicion upon Richard. The murder is finally cleared up by the confession of Torinni that the criminal, to his personal knowledge, is William Durgin. The strike and the incidental treatment of the labor problem are almost wholly gratuitous. One must conclude that they were included for their own sake, and not because they facilitated the movement of the plot.

Aldrich's treatment of the labor problem is characterized throughout by dispassionate superficiality. In 1880 the labor problem in its more acute aspects was a comparatively new development. Aldrich did not go into it very deeply. He did, however, have a few half-formed opinions about it - the sort of opinions one might expect a dispassionate observer to have. They were safe opinions, orthodox opinions - the kind of opinions the twentieth century small business man quotes from the editorials of Republican and Democratic newspapers. The chief difficulty with them is not ~~so much~~ that they are prejudiced so much as that they are inadequate; Aldrich was not sufficiently familiar with the problem to appreciate its complexity.

Aldrich gives expression to his opinions in three ways: through his hero, through his own description and exposition, and through the conservative workman Stevens. When Richard first comes back from the sea Durgin tells him about certain rules of the Marble Workers' Association concerning apprentices. The gist of the matter is that the marble workers, because they believe that the fewer the number of skilled men the higher the wages will be, allow Slocum to employ only two apprentices at a time. Richard makes the mental observation that this policy is very narrow, because Slocum, if he

is unable to find enough skilled workmen to fill his contracts, will be forced to reject some of the contracts, and thus in the long run to place an obstacle in the way of the industrial expansion of the community. The point is rather well taken. It is true that a policy of limiting the number of skilled workmen, by impeding industrial expansion, may cause unemployment. It is also true, however, that a policy of allowing an unlimited number of apprentices would tend to decrease wages in the marble industry. Aldrich offers no final solution. He points out the difficulty; that is all.

Most of Aldrich's observations are rather threadbare. Richard, for instance, spouts with perfect naiveté the old platitude about the saving grace of political democracy: "Every soul of us has the privilege of bettering our condition if we have the brain and industry to do it. Energy and intelligence come to the front and have the right to be there."\* He also gives voice in some remarks about Torinni to the orthodox opinion of foreign radicals: "There was never any trouble to speak of among the trades in Stillwater till he and two or three others came here with foreign grievances. These people get three times the pay they received in their own land, and are treated like human beings for the first time in their lives."\*\* Later on Aldrich himself interposes a significant reference to the professional agitator: "Then there came down from the great city a glib person disguised as The Workingman's Friend, - no workingman himself, mind you, but a ghoul that lives upon subscriptions and sucks the senses out of innocent human beings, - who managed to set the place by the ears."\*\*\* He manages also to give some impression of his conception of socialism. He tells us that "Torinni advanced some Utopian theories touching a universal

\* p 144

\*\* p 143

\*\*\* p 176

distribution of wealth."\* Aldrich gives one the impression on the whole that he thought of socialism as a matter merely of taking all of the money from one's pocket and giving somebody else half. I suppose he is not the only one who has thought of socialism that way.

No orthodox discussion of the labor problem is complete without some reference to the inseparability of labor and capital.

Aldrich includes it in the following form:

Stevens - "William, do you know about the Siamese Twins?"

Durgin - "What about 'em,- they're dead, ain't they?"

Stevens - "I believe so, but when they was alive, if you was to pinch one of those fellows, the other fellow would sing out.

----When either of them fetched the other a clip, he knocked

himself down. Labor and capital is jined just as those two was."

\*\*

All this is supposed to mean that labor and capital should get together. Aldrich is sane enough to recognize, however, that in some cases capital refuses to get together on reasonable terms, and that in those cases labor is justified in calling a strike. Thus he has Richard say: "Now sometimes it is an injustice that is being fought, and then it is right to fight it with the only weapon a poor man has to wield against a power which possesses a hundred weapons,- and that's a strike. For example, the smelters and casters in the Miantowona Iron Works are meanly underpaid."\*\*\*

Aldrich is not wholly prejudiced. He is dispassionate, and, in spite of his conservative leanings, he tries to be impartial. He is neither vicious in his attitude toward the laborer nor profuse in his adulation of the employer. His is the attitude of the golden mean. The trouble is, he fails to discover the exact location of the golden mean. He admits that the workmen are justified in striking

when they have been done an injustice. He fails, however, to supply any criteria whereby one may decide just what is and what is not an injustice; nor does he suggest any course the workmen may pursue in case their strike is a failure.

Before leaving "The Stillwater Tragedy" it should be remarked that it is a fairly artistic piece of work. Aldrich's style is always pleasing; at least it never sandpapers one's sensibilities. Besides a fairly good style, the novel has plenty of plot interest and fairly good characters. The characters, it is true, are not subtly done; they are surface characters. Yet one feels that they may be human. Many of them are from the lower class. Possibly Aldrich's principal distinction is that he gave to the novel of the labor problem lower class characters that might possibly be conceived of as human beings. He is the only writer of the nineteenth century who did this. Howells contributed several very good characters, better than any of those in "The Stillwater Tragedy", but none of them belonged to the lower class.

### 3 - "The Breadwinners"

"The Stillwater Tragedy" is not a thesis novel; it is not exclusively concerned with proving a certain point. It was left for a man much more positive than Aldrich to treat the problem in a novel of the thesis type. The next man to enter the field, John Hay, was not perturbed by any fear lest his attitude should be partial. He had rather strong feelings in the matter, and his novel "The Breadwinners" (1883) was an attempt to make his prejudices appear rational. "The Breadwinners" is a true thesis novel. The attitude of the author is bold and well-defined, and the novel exists not so much for purposes of entertainment as for the purpose of proving the correctness of that attitude. "The Breadwinners", says Thayer, "is

the first important polemic in American fiction in defence of property."\*

John Hay was a politician by training and a capitalist by marriage. He was private secretary to President Lincoln, Colonel and later Adjutant General in the army, and finally diplomatic envoy to Paris, Vienna, and Madrid. He was also for a time editorial writer on the staff of the New York Tribune, and for a time Assistant Secretary of State. All these functionaries he had been before he started to write "The Breadwinners". Throughout his life he was a member of the Republican Party. Thayer excuses him for his party affiliation as follows:"-----John Hay continued to be a Republican, not because that party fostered plutocracy in granting special privileges to capital, but because, first of all, it had saved the Union, it had put down slavery."\*\* What Thayer says is undoubtedly correct. Whatever one may say of Hay, he was not corrupt. He undoubtedly believed that what he said and what he did was perfectly right. He undoubtedly thought that his stand was the only stand by which he might preserve the ideal of the American constitution. He was, in other words, a blind patriot rather than a corrupt politician. Thayer's statement, while it does indicate that his intentions were good, does not indicate that his intellect was discriminating.

In 1873 Hay married the daughter of one Amasa Stone, a financier of Cleveland, Ohio. In 1877 he was in Cleveland looking after the affairs of his millionaire father-in-law during the latter's absence. 1877, it may be remembered, was the high water mark of the Northern Pacific Panic and the year of the railroad strike. The strike, it seems, took Cleveland by storm. Hay's letters to

\*Wm. R. Thayer - Life and Letters of John Hay - V. II

\*\* Ibid - V. I - p 422

not

Stone were full of it. Cleveland was without its share of rioting and its share of unemployed; the latter Hay very sympathetically calls tramps. Hay's reaction to the whole affair was very pronounced. His attitude is indicated in a remark concerning a certain political candidate. "All his sympathies", he says, "are with the laboring man, and none with the man whose enterprise and capital give him a living." Some hint of why he felt that way may be gathered from the interest he expresses in the letter of July 27th concerning the effect of the strike on the value of railroad stocks.

It was during the year 1877 that the germ of "The Breadwinners" began to undermine Hay's constitution. He did not write it, however, until the winter of 1822-23. When he had it finished he sent the manuscript to his friend William Dean Howells, who promptly read it and wrote Hay that he liked it. In fairness to Howells I feel bound to emphasize the fact that he did not publish a favorable criticism of "The Breadwinners" for the perusal of the general public; even a literary critic may lie to his friends. Howells presented the manuscript to Aldrich, now editor of the Atlantic, and urged him to accept it for serial publication. Aldrich, however, refused to accept it except upon the condition that the author consent to publish his name, and Hay wished to remain anonymous. Hay's reason for remaining anonymous he later stated to be that his position would be compromised if he were to let himself be known - his position, perhaps, as a potential candidate for political office. The story in the end was published anonymously in the Century, the first installment appearing in August, 1883. Unlike "The Stillwater Tragedy", it attracted a great deal of attention. "The Stillwater Tragedy" had been read, undoubtedly, by the cultured gentlemen who habitually turned the

\* Thayer - Life of Hay - V. II - p 6

pages of the Atlantic, but it had not created a sensation. "The Breadwinners" did. The magazines, it is true, did not say much about "The Breadwinners". What they said, furthermore, was not especially favorable. The reviewer for The Literary World, for instance, stated that the only possible reason he could see for reviewing the book at all was that it had attracted attention, and went on to denounce it as one of the worst things he had ever read.\* But what of that? The newspapers liked it, and the public bought it. It was published in London and translated into several foreign languages.\*\*

"The Breadwinners" is set in Buffland, Ohio, which is really Cleveland. It has a variegated and at the same time integrated plot, including two love stories, an unsuccessful attempt at murder, a successful attempt at murder, and a strike - really the strike of 1877. Arthur Farnham, the hero, is a rich land owner who has previously been an officer in the army. He falls in love with the cultured Alice Belding, a young lady of the aristocracy. Maude Matchin, the daughter of a joiner, falls in love with Farnham. Sam Sleeny, a joiner like Maude's father, being in love with Maude, naturally does not care much for her new flame. The villain, Andy Offitt, uses Sleeny's envy of the capitalist Farnham as a means of dragging him into the Brotherhood of Breadwinners, a society which seems as far as one can discover to be essentially anarchistic. All this is chiefly preliminary. When the story begins to move, it moves fast. Maude proposes to Farnham, and is turned down. Offitt, encouraged to a slight extent by Maude, attempts to kill Farnham, and tries to fix

\* The Literary World - Boston - Jan. 26, 1884 - V.15 - p 27

\*\* Undoubtedly the author's anonymity had something to do with the popularity of "The Breadwinners". See the speculative article by Myron B. Benton - Critic - N. Y. - March 1, 1884 - V. 4 - p 97

the blame upon Sleeney. Sleeney breaks jail and kills Offitt. Finally Sleeney marries Maude; and Farnham, who, as I implied, has refused to die, marries Alice Belding. The strike has two plot functions: it gives Farnham a chance to rescue <sup>Alice</sup> ~~Maude~~ from Offitt's rioters, and it serves to bring out fully the villainous character of the villains.

Hay's method of expressing his attitude on the labor problem is simple. He makes every one of his villains a member of the lower class and more specifically a member of the radical Brotherhood of Breadwinners, an organization having as its purpose the securing of a more equable distribution of wealth. Andy Offitt, for instance, is a professional labor agitator, who subsists on the dues paid into the treasury of the Brotherhood of Breadwinners. The description of Andy's face indicates the balanced and sympathetic tone of the entire work: "It was a face whose whole expression was oleaginous. It was surmounted by a low and shining forehead covered by reeking black hair, worn rather long, the ends being turned under by the brush. The mustache was long and drooping, dyed black, and profusely oiled, the dye and the grease forming an inharmonic compound. The parted lips, which were coarse and thin, displayed an imperfect set of teeth, much discolored with tobacco. The eyes were light green, with the space that should have been white suffused with yellow and red. It was one of those gifted countenances which could change in a moment from a dog-like fawning to a snaky venomousness."\* A secondary villain, Bott, is by profession a spiritualistic medium. (Hay evidently had two bones to pick.) Otherwise Bott gives one almost exactly the same impression as Offitt. A few little things like mustaches and hair, of course, vary a little even among professional reformers. Mr. Hay could see that himself. But the general impression of filth and crime is the same. Besides Offitt and Bott, there are

two or three minor villains, all of them Breadwinners, and all very much alike.

Not all of the working class characters in "The Breadwinners" are criminals. Sleeney and Maude are merely stupid - well meaning, but stupid. The reason Sleeney is dragged into the Brotherhood of Breadwinners, and incidentally into the riots, is because he is too stupid to see through the representations of Offitt. Sleeney is undoubtedly supposed to represent the rank and file of the working class. Hay seems to have regarded the proletariat as unanimously feeble-minded. Even Maude Matchin, who has graduated from high school, is easily led into the impropriety of proposing to Farnham the third time she meets him. The ignorance of the proletariat is not only unanimous, but also hereditary; no amount of education can change it.

If some of the workers are criminal and all of them stupid, one expects the converse to be true of the upper classes. The expectation is justified. Farnham himself is ~~ENE~~ "one of those fortunate natures, who, however born, are always well bred, and come by prescription to most of the good things the world can give." Note the words "however born"; if they mean anything, they mean that Farnham's breeding was hereditary; I suppose the first time he ever saw pie he knew by intuition that he was supposed to eat it with a fork. Farnham is perfect. Alice Belding is perfect. Mr. Temple, the vice president of the rolling mill corporation is - well - Mr. Temple's sole interests in life are wine, horses, and business; personally, I should not say that he had reached the summit of human evolution; as far as Hay was concerned, however, there is no doubt that Mr. Temple was perfect too.

From an artistic point of view "The Breadwinners" is pretty

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bad. The descriptions and characterizations come in large chunks. The plot is not probable. The characters are not convincing. The performance as a whole is decidedly reminiscent of the five cent novel. Hay was not cut out for a novelist; he was not sufficiently subtle. Neither was he cut out for a careful student of the labor problem. Whatever else one may say about him, however, he never leaves one in doubt about where he stands. He believed in the existing order. In anyone who questioned the adequacy of the existing order to secure to everyone without the interference of organized labor exactly what he deserved, he was ready to find criminal tendencies. He believed no man could possibly be unemployed except on account of his own aversion for work. He seems to have believed also that no workman could possibly be underpaid. In short, as far as Hay was concerned, there was really no labor problem at all; the problem had no existence except as a creation of the professional agitators.

Thayer tells us that there were several replies to "The Breadwinners", the principal one of them being "The Money Makers" by Henry F. Keenan.\*

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\*I have not yet been able to locate "The Money Makers". I shall include it here when I do.

CHAPTER III  
BELLAMY AND HOWELLS

1 - Introduction

During the time Hay was writing "The Breadwinners" the labor problem was growing more insistent. The period from 1878 to 1886 witnessed the rapid growth of two important organizations, the Knights of Labor and the International Working-People's Association. (The latter was the official organization of the anarchists.) Both of them reached their culmination in 1886. The year 1886 marked the close of a two year panic. Labor in that year was provoked to the point of action, and the action took the form of widespread strikes of the Knights of Labor, most of them unsuccessful. In connection with one of these, the strike on the McCormick Reaper Company of Chicago, anarchism met its Waterloo. Anarchism had its stronghold in Chicago. Consequently when the employees of the McCormick Company went on strike the anarchists were active in addressing their meetings. The police arrived to break up one of these meetings, and a bomb was thrown. As a result seven anarchists, the best men in the organization, were convicted of murder, and four of them were actually hanged. This is the gist of the still famous affair of Haymarket. Its chief consequence was the sudden death of the whole anarchist movement.

Further than being the year of the strikes and the Haymarket affair, the year 1886 witnessed a great deal of radical political activity. In various states independent labor parties were formed and carried on fairly successful campaigns. In New York City Henry George, with his semi-socialistic land theory, very narrowly escaped being elected mayor. On the whole, the labor problem was certainly growing more acute. Neither the strikes, the anarchistic agitation,

nor the political parties, however, seemed to be solving it. It was beginning to be regarded as a complex affair.

## 2 - "Looking Backward"

Not long after the excitement of 1886, while the memory of it was still fresh in the public mind, Bellamy published his "Looking Backward" (1888). Almost immediately the book became immensely popular; its sales mounted to a number second only to the number of the sales of "Uncle Tom's Cabin". The public had been baffled by two panics, a slaughter of anarchists, and a series of futile strikes. The situation was beginning to look hopeless. Bellamy gave them something to look forward to. Before the publication of "Looking Backward" the public had begun to realize that something was wrong with the existing social organization, but had not fully decided what sort of organization they wanted in its place. Bellamy told them.

Edward Bellamy was a Boston man, the son of a clergyman. He was educated for the law, but did not practice it. Before he wrote "Looking Backward" he was known as the author of fanciful tales having an ethical bearing after the manner of Hawthorne. His two principal works before "Looking Backward" were "Dr. Heidenhoff's Process" and "Miss Ludington's Sister". "Looking Backward" itself was not originally planned as a serious work. Before 1888 Bellamy was not greatly concerned with social reform. He had not read any appreciable amount of Utopian or socialistic literature. When he sat down to write "Looking Backward" he intended to make it merely "a fanciful tale of universal harmony and felicity"\*, but as he wrote the serious aspect of the thing impressed him more and more. Finally he gave up his original idea and seriously essayed the task of blue-

\* Sylvester S. Baxter - The Author of "Looking Backward" - New England Magazine - September 1889 - V. I - p 92

printing the ideal society. His Utopia is both an ideal and a prophecy. Before he had finished writing about it he had become thoroughly convinced that this creation of his imagination was not only a representation of society as it should be, but also a representation of society as it would be in the year 2000.

The plot of "Looking Backward" is very simple. Julian West, a citizen of the Boston of 1887, is hypnotized and then lost under the ruins of a building. It happens that he remains undisturbed there until the year 2000, when he is discovered and brought out of his trance by a certain Dr. Leete. From his awakening to the end of the book the story is primarily Julian's account of his own gradual familiarization with the peculiarities of twenty-first century Boston. There is also an insignificant love plot and a dream. The dream is important because it is the one thoroughly dramatic part of the book. The plot is merely a device to make palatable the description of Utopia; the principal concern of the author is Utopia itself.

The outstanding feature of Bellamy's Utopia is the national ownership of the means of production. This feature makes it possible for the citizens to live comfortably by working only from the age of twenty-one to the age of forty-five. All wages are equal, but the hours of labor vary in proportion to the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the work. Each man and woman chooses his own occupation subject to the needs of the nation. Men and women are economic and political equals. The government of the nation is vested in the hands of those who are beyond the age of forty-five and who have consequently retired from active industry.

The principal criticisms of Bellamy's Utopia are somewhat as follows: that it fails to provide ~~for~~ sufficient personal liberty;

that it would kill individuality and thus cause a dead level of mediocrity; that it fails to provide sufficient incentive to work; and that its prosperity is purely material prosperity, ~~and~~ not spiritual or cultural prosperity. I shall not attempt to discuss whether or not these criticisms are justified. The question of incentive is undoubtedly the most important. Bellamy had a great deal of the faith of the sentimentalists in the innate goodness of human nature. He believed that it was only necessary to convince men that the order under which they were living was practically and ethically wrong in order to get them to change it for the new and work harmoniously together ever after. He insisted that the apparent evil in human nature was due entirely to the claw and fang economic system of the nineteenth century, and that under a co-operative system that apparent evil would disappear.

Bellamy gives not only a picture of Utopia, but also some analysis of contemporary conditions. I suppose the one thing from "Looking Backward" that everyone remembers is the illustration of nineteenth century society as a high coach, driven by hunger and drawn by the workers, with the capitalists riding on top. It is clear that Bellamy believed the percentage of misery among the workers to be very high. It is remarkable, however, that he <sup>was</sup> ~~is~~ careful to represent the positions of the capitalists on top of the carriage to be very precarious; the capitalists as well as the slaves are haunted by the specter of insecurity. Bellamy believed that the capitalists were almost as dissatisfied with the state of affairs as the slaves - that even the capitalists were fundamentally opposed to the law of <sup>claw</sup> ~~tooth~~ and fang. He actually thought that a great many of them would acquiesce in the change from individualism to nationalism without a struggle. Bellamy approached the subject

from the ethical point of view; he appealed to rich and poor alike to abolish fratricidal competition. He did not believe there would be any great difficulty about the transition; he took care to state that there would be no violence. The class struggle he did not emphasize. As Hillquit says, "The historical development of society and the theory of the class struggle, which play so great a part in the philosophy of modern socialism, have no place in Bellamy's system. With him it is all a question of expediency; he is not an exponent of the laws of social development, but a social inventor."\*

Speaking of <sup>the laws of social</sup> ~~historical~~ development, however, there is one tendency of the nineteenth century that Bellamy did grasp. It is impossible to overemphasize the importance Bellamy attached to the growth of monopolies. He regarded this tendency as the key to the future. He believed that when the monopolies had grown to a certain point the people would recognize that the natural thing to do was to unite them all into one great monopoly, a monopoly managed by the government in the interest of all the people.

Bellamy says in his novel something about all three aspects of the labor problem: contemporary conditions, the new order, and methods of change from the old to the new. The <sup>emphasis</sup> ~~piece de resistance~~ in "Looking Backward", however, is certainly <sup>upon</sup> the new order - the ultimate solution. Bellamy was concerned with giving to the vague striving of society some definite objective. The fact that society was looking for just such an objective is proven by the book's tremendous success. The extent of the influence of "Looking Backward" may be judged from the fact that it inspired the formation of a new and extensive organization, the Nationalist Club, which included in the period of its greatest power no less than one hundred and sixty-

\* History of Socialism - p 289

two branches in various parts of the country. The great distinction of "Looking Backward" is that it is the chief source of the popular conception of socialism in America. Many of the active socialists in America are students of Karl Marx. After all, however, comparatively few people read Marx, and most people could not understand him if they did; but almost everyone who has any serious interest in the labor problem has read Bellamy - or perhaps I should say almost everyone who is fairly well along in years. It is true that the younger generation does not read Bellamy. Since about 1910 "Looking Backward" has not been in demand. But the younger generation gets its impression of socialism from Bellamy nevertheless; only instead of getting that impression directly, the younger generation gets it at second hand from those who became familiar with the contents of "Looking Backward" in the period of ~~its~~ <sup>Bellamy's</sup> triumph.

### 3 - "A Hazard of New Fortunes"

Thus far the labor problem had been handled by a literary innovator, a potential dime novelist, and a Utopian romancer. It remained only for the theme to be picked up by a realist, and it was only fitting that that realist should be William Deal Howells. Howells had been editor of the Atlantic at the time the Atlantic published "The Stillwater Tragedy". He had been the first to read the manuscript of "The Breadwinners", and had advised Aldrich to take it. Whether or not he was acquainted with Bellamy before the writing of "Looking Backward" I can not say; he tells us himself that he was later on.\*

Howells's method of handling the labor problem was wholly different from that of Bellamy. Outside of that, however, the two men were not unlike each other. Both were dominantly ethical.

\* "Edward Bellamy" - Atlantic - August, 1894 - V. 82 - p 253

Bellamy was the son of a clergyman. Howells was the son of an Ohio Swedenborgian; he talked philosophy with his father at the age of ten. ~~Howells and Bellamy~~ <sup>Howells and Bellamy</sup> agreed substantially about the evils of the present system and also about the ideal state.

It was in the eventful year of 1886 that Howells became interested in the problem of labor. In that year he came under the influence of Tolstoy, the man who remained his chief literary and philosophical passion for the rest of his life. It was not until 1889, however, that he wrote "A Hazard of New Fortunes", his first important novel dealing with the labor problem. He had mentioned the problem in "Annie Kilbourn" of the year before, but had not elaborated upon it.

"A Hazard of New Fortunes" encountered greater immediate favor than any of the novels Howells had written previously. It is not a true thesis novel; yet it is as near the thesis type as a novel can be and still ~~remain~~ be a thoroughly artistic piece of work. Van Doren calls it one of Howells's six best novels and "the best of all novels of New York."\* Cooke also pays tribute to it.\*\* Surely, judged purely from the artistic point of view it is infinitely superior to anything up to its time. Howells was both a thinker and a first rate novelist. Aldrich was merely a fair novelist. Hay was neither a thinker nor a novelist. Bellamy, while primarily a thinker, was not an exceptionally poor novelist; ~~nevertheless~~ <sup>nevertheless</sup> ~~time~~ he was not a very good one. His style is not at all bad; yet it is characterized by a certain vulgar phraseology. Bellamy sacrificed the highest beauty of style in order to appeal to the average reader. His whole method is adapted to the average. Besides a fair style, "Looking Backward" has at least one well handled dramatic situation.

\* Cambridge History of American Literature - Bk. III - Pt. II -p 184  
 \*\* D.G. Cooke-"William Dean Howells" - First part of last chapter

Its characters, however, are not even well drawn types. One may safely venture the statement that considering the type of novel he wrote and the type of reader he was trying to reach, Bellamy did almost as well as anyone could do. The very conditions I mention, however, precluded the possibility of his novel being a thoroughly excellent work of art.

"A Hazard of New Fortunes" made several distinct and valuable contributions to the literature of the labor problem. It was, as I mentioned, the first novel to be handled in an exceptionally well-balanced, artistic manner. It was the first novel to have subtly-drawn characters.\* Since many of these characters are peculiarly the psychological products of their time, and especially of certain phases of the labor problem of their time, it is the first novel of the labor problem having any great historical value. Besides all this, "A Hazard of New Fortunes" presents with a certain amount of subtlety various phases of the labor problem itself.\*\* Finally, it treats the whole problem from the Tolstoyan point of view.

I shall not attempt to outline the entire plot of "A Hazard of New Fortunes". In the sense of definite complication, climax, and denouement, there is very little plot in it. Howells, true to his own brand of realism, makes it primarily a study of characters. Basil March comes to New York to edit a new magazine. He comes in contact with various men who have some connection, voluntarily or otherwise, with the labor problem. As the story goes on, the author uses March as a mouthpiece, commenting through him from time to time upon the characters and events of the tale. For the rest, the more significant parts of the story are best included in my treatment of the characters. The important characters are Dryfoos and

\* Aldrich's characters were external and somewhat superficial.  
 \*\* Bellamy's picture of contemporary conditions was done with a broad brush.

his son Conrad, and Lindau. They are important not because they are more deftly handled than others Howells has fashioned, but because they mean more.\*

Dryfoos was originally an Ohio farmer. He became suddenly wealthy through the accident of oil being discovered ~~upon~~ <sup>on</sup> his land. In this he is peculiarly a product of ~~his time~~ the eighties; in the eighties men who had become wealthy through just such accidents were numerous; in the twenties of the present century they are very scarce. Dryfoos, for want of anything else to do with himself, enters the game of financial speculation. He gets the speculative fever - and his fortune, as it happens, rapidly increases. In the meantime, he has moved his family to New York in the hope of having them break into society. His family, however, fails to break in. His wife and daughters are unhappy in New York. Dryfoos himself is represented as undergoing a gradual process of moral degeneration as a result of his ~~sudden~~ growing desire for financial power. Gradually he becomes dehumanized. He retains, however, his affection for his son; Conrad is the one real human interest in his life. But Dryfoos and his son have widely divergent points of view. Dryfoos is a reactionary; because he happens to be rich, he believes that the rich deserve to be rich and that the poor deserve to suffer - and that labor unions should be crushed. Because he is himself a financial success, he ~~is~~ measures all success by the mercenary standard; hence he insists that his son interest himself in the pursuit of wealth. Conrad, however, insists upon interesting himself in Christian settlement work in the slums. He can not sympathize with his father's point of view, nor his father with his. His son's persistent refusal to catch the fever of speculation

\* See similar statement in "New York in Recent Fiction"- Atlantic -  
April 1890 - V. 65

irritate<sup>s</sup> Dryfoos, and causes him to treat Conrad very badly. Finally he goes so far as to strike Conrad in the face. Before he has a chance to become reconciled to his son the latter is accidentally killed.

Conrad himself is the perfect Christian trying to do his own little bit toward the ultimate realization of the brotherhood of all men by preaching the gospel of Christ and living the life of Christ. He is the Tolstoy<sup>a</sup>n ideal, and consequently without doubt the character in the book whom Howells unreservedly admired. In so far as there is a climax, his death constitutes the climax of the novel. It occurs in connection with the street car strike introduced in the latter part of the book. Conrad goes to the place where the strikers hold their meeting for the purpose of counselling them against violence. When he arrives he finds that rioting is already in progress, and sees his friend Lindau, the German socialist, being clubbed by the police. He meets his death, while trying to rescue Lindau, by a bullet that was aimed at someone else. <sup>P</sup>Lindau, the socialist, is a German who had come to America after having fought in the German revolution of 1848. Before the Civil War he had run a newspaper somewhere in Kansas. Whatever radical tendencies he had imported from Germany he had expressed before the war in the form of anti-slavery agitation. At the outbreak of the war he had enlisted in the Northern army. In the course of the fighting he had lost an arm. After the war he had witnessed the events of the panic years; he had witnessed the rapid growth of the monopolies and the subjugation of the workers. He came to see that it was partly for this, the triumph of the northern capitalists, that he had lost his arm. As a result he reasserted

his radical theory of 1848 with additions from Karl Marx. Finally, in the story proper, he is clubbed to death, while <sup>still</sup> reasserting this theory, by a member of the New York police; <sup>he is now</sup> an old man, reduced to poverty by the industrial evolution of the country. Lindau is peculiarly a product of the eighties, a socialist of the era of disillusionment. It is appropriate that he should have been a German, and even more appropriate that he should have come to America after participating in the rebellion of 1848.\* Lindau's socialism is the socialism of rapid disillusionment, the socialism of righteous indignation. Lindau had idealized the United States. He had fought in the Civil War in the faith that he was fighting for the three principles of the Declaration of Independence. With the developments following the war he came to realize that his faith had been unfounded. The three principles of life, liberty, and happiness were being trampled in the dust by the gigantic corporations; the war had not abolished slavery, but had extended slavery to include the whites. Lindau was astounded. He was now an old man; so he never quite accustomed himself to the new state of affairs. The modern socialist is usually one who has <sup>5</sup> had experience with the tyranny of the monopolies from the first and is consequently used to it. Lindau never became used to it. He continued to the end of his days to give voluble expression to his righteous indignation.

Another character that has some significance is Colonel Woodburn. Colonel Woodburn is introduced into the story not because he plays an important part in the development of the plot, but merely because he represents a point of view that Howells seems not to have felt justified in ignoring. Woodburn's idea is that the North made a mistake in abolishing slavery. He believes that

\* As I have pointed out above, it was the Germans, and especially the refugees of '48, that were responsible for the rise of socialism in the U.S.

with all its abuses slavery might have been developed into a sort of caste system that would ultimately have included all the members of society and would have solved the labor problem. His social ideal is what Jack London later called Benevolent Feudalism.

For the most part, Howells presents his characters with their various points of view on the labor problem and lets the reader decide for himself which is correct. He does not, however, leave the reader entirely in the dark concerning what he thought about it himself. His own criticism takes the form for the most part of comments made by Basil March.

I shall try to give a brief summary of Howells's theory according to the convenient classification of criticism of the existing order, ultimate solution, and immediate steps.

Howells' principal criticism of the individualistic regime is fully stated in the following speech of Basil March. "-----  
 What I object to is this economic chance-world in which we live, and which we men seem to have created. It ought to be law as inflexible in human affairs as the order of day and night in the physical world, that if a man will work he shall both rest and eat, and shall not be harassed with any question as to how his repose and his provision shall come. Nothing less ideal than this satisfies the reason. But in our state of things no one is secure in this."

\* Howells did not stop, however, with a protest against insecurity. Even, a society where the majority are insecure and some of them miserable, it may be that those who are secure, principally the monopolists, and who are in a way responsible for the insecurity of the others, hold their positions of power by just right because of their unusual merit; and it may be that those who are not secure

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deserve no better fortune than they have. This, it may be remembered, was the position of John Hay. Howells did not agree with it. The best proof that he did not is in the contrasted characters of Dryfoos and Lindau. Dryfoos, the capitalist, is, with one exception, the least admirable character in the book. He is not merely a small man morally, but also a rather insignificant figure intellectually.\* Lindau, on the other hand, the nearest approach to a character ~~from~~ the lower class, in spite of the fact that he is not always discreet, is wholly admirable. In Howells' works the small man is usually the capitalist; rulers of society are marked not by moral and intellectual strength and breadth, but rather by greed and narrowness. A man of the mental caliber of Hay, if he came to see the capitalist in this light, would immediately have turned from him in contempt. Howells, however, had a broader vision. He did not damn the capitalist for his meanness, because he saw that the capitalist was not wholly responsible. Basil March comments on this point as follows: "We can't put it all on conditions; we must put some of the blame on character. But conditions make character; and people are greedy and foolish, and wish to have and to shine, because having and shining are held up to them by civilization as the chief good of life. We all know they are not the chief good, perhaps not good at all; but if someone ventures to say so all the rest of us call him a fraud or a crank and go moiling and toiling on to the palace or the pporhouse. We can't help it. If one were less greedy, or less foolish, someone else would have and would shine at his expense."\*

As ~~of~~ corollary to his belief in the responsibility of conditions for character, Howells believed in the perfectibility of

\* The exception is Beaton. Beaton is far superior to Dryfoos intellectually, but inferior to him morally.

\* Vol. II, Pages 253-254.

the human. Even in the selfishness of man he saw a certain indication of altruism. He explains, or rather March explains, that men are avaricious not for themselves alone, but for their children. His explanation reminds one of the famous statement of Marx that a man who has children "gives hostages to capitalism", although his application of it is hardly the same as that of Marx.

Howells believed not only that the human was perfectible, but also that he was constantly approaching nearer perfection, and that the whole process would terminate in the universal brotherhood of man. In this we see the influence of Tolstoy. His own description of that influence is as follows: "Tolstoy gave me heart to hope that the world may yet be made over in the image of Him who died for it, when all Caesar's things shall be rendered unto Caesar, and men shall come into their own, into the right to labor and the right to enjoy the fruits of their labor, each one master of himself and servant to every other. He taught me to see life not as a chase of a forever impossible personal happiness, but as a field for endeavor toward the happiness of the whole human family."\* True to his theory, Howells has every character in "A Hazard of New Fortunes" a better man in the end than he was in the beginning. Most of the improvement is due to the influence of Conrad. Hence, one is bound to conclude that the method of Conrad is Howells' own idea of the true method of achieving the ultimate brotherhood of man. Lindau, with his constant railing against the existing order and the capitalists is made to seem futile. The strike itself, we are given to understand, is not unjustified, but is ineffective. Conrad, however, with his Christian humility and love of all men, does not die in vain. The method of applying the

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\* "My Literary Passions" (1895) Page 251.

doctrine of Christ to one's daily living, we must conclude, was Howells' idea of the only effective way of ameliorating the evils of individualism. The proper way to improve society, he thought, was to start at home by improving one's own character. It was a very slow method. That is very evident from the novel. Even Dryfoos, the man one would expect to be most affected by Conrad's death, is by no means thoroughly regenerated on the spur of the moment. He is improved, but only to the extent of glossing over one or two of his most insane prejudices. Howells' way was a very slow way, but, in 1889 at least, it seems to have been the only way Howells could suggest.

After all, Howells was in no great hurry about the millennium. The reason he was not is fairly obvious. In spite of the fact that he gave to the novel of the labor problem a great many things, there are one or two things that he left out. For one thing, he omitted characters from the very low classes; and he steered clear of concrete representations of conditions among the very low classes. He certainly did take the labor problem out of the realm of mere prejudice and religious speculation and subject it to careful analysis; but somehow he seems always to think of the problem in the abstract. He asks us to sympathize with the suffering of the poor without making that suffering concrete. He lets us see the problem through the primarily ethical conflicts of his characters, and those characters themselves are not familiar with the acute manifestations of the problem through physical experience. There is not one true lower class character in the book. As for any concrete presentation of suffering, the nearest Howells approaches that is in a brief and hazy description of a lower class street and a glimpse of a man trying to make a meal from the more

edible bits of garbage in the gutter. Cooke seems to think the reason Howells avoided the concrete was because of his delicacy.\* Howells himself strengthened him in this conclusion; Howells' pet remark was that the American novelist, if he wished to sell his books, must write them primarily for the perusal of women. In spite of this it seems to me that Van Doren gives us a more fundamental reason when he tells us that Howells' knowledge of the lower classes was restricted.\*\* Perhaps Howells would not have taken his readers from the realm of the vaguely humanitarian into the slime even if he had known something about the slime. One does not feel, however, that Howells would have been able to take the reader into the slime if he had wished. All this may explain why Howells was not in a hurry about the millennium. The sort of sympathy that makes one desire immediate action is not the product of arm chair speculation.

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\* D.G.Cooke "Wm. D. Howells" - Pages 227-229.

\*\* Carl Van Doren "The American Novel" - Page 149.

CHAPTER IV  
CHIEFLY UTOPIAN

## 1 - Introduction

Howells was not the man to write one book on the labor problem and then stop. The first work after "A Hazard of New Fortunes" in which he devoted to the subject an entire volume was "A Traveller from Altruria" (1894).\* In the meantime, things were happening in the world.

The latter eighties and the nineties marked an unprecedented growth of monopolies. This period may almost be looked upon as marking the definite downfall of competition and the definite beginning of the control of the United States by trusts. On account of this growth single labor organizations came to include larger numbers of members than formerly, until in 1892 labor was organized on a gigantic scale. In that year another crisis set in, a crisis that was to last until 1898. As a result of this crisis there was another series of strikes. Among these the most familiar are the Carnegie Steel strike at Homestead, Pennsylvania; the strike of the Idaho lead miners; the Buffalo switchmen's strike; the Tennessee coal strike; and most important of all, the strike that made Eugene V. Debs famous, the American Railway Union strike. All of these occurred between 1892 and 1894. They were usually brief and unsuccessful, but intense; and they involved in almost every case the liberal use of Pinkertons, troops, and injunctions. Probably this two year period from 1892 to 1894 was the greatest strike period in American history. The strikes, however, were by no means the only manifestations of discontent. The Nationalist Clubs inspired by "Looking Backward" were active. Societies of Christian Socialists,

\* There is some mention of the subject in "The Quality of Mercy" (1892) and in "The World of Chance" (1893).

with essentially Tolstoyan ideals, were organized. Fabian societies were organized after the model of those in England; their ideals were socialistic, but their purpose was limited to education. Above all, the People's Party, commonly known as the Populist Party, came into prominence. This party aimed to unite the interests of farmers and industrial workers;\* it included in its platform certain planks that were essentially socialistic - planks favoring the government ownership of certain public utilities. It ~~reached~~ <sup>attained</sup> its greatest power in 1894, the year of Coxe's and Kelley's industrial armies. In 1896 even the Democratic party came out in favor of certain phases of government ownership. The decade of the nineties, on the whole, was a decade of widespread activity in both the economic and the political fields. The reason it failed to accomplish much is probably that the activity was a little too widespread - too heterogeneous.

## 2 - "A Traveller from Altruria"

In the November of 1892 Howells began the serial publication in the Cosmopolitan of "A Traveller from Altruria"\*\*, a novel which was definitely the result of the influence upon the writer of Bellamy's "Looking Backward". The influence of Bellamy ~~did~~ probably did not become dominant in time greatly to affect the conception of "A Hazard of New Fortunes", but it certainly had a great deal to do with the writing of "A Traveller from Altruria"; one has only to look at the internal evidence to see that. Howells does not, it is true, follow to the letter Bellamy's method. He does instead exactly what one would expect a realist to do - exactly reverses the method of Bellamy. Instead of having a victim of the conditions of 1887 visit the ideal commonwealth of Boston in the year 2000, he has a genuine,

\* The farm problem was becoming at this time very acute.

\*\* Ran in Cosmopolitan until October, 1893; book form 1894.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ citizen of the commonwealth of Altruria ( even more ideal, if anything, than Bellamy's Utopia ) pay a visit to the United States of the early nineties. Through this method Howells is enabled to devote most of his time to a study of contemporary conditions. Both "Looking Backward" and "A Traveller from Altruria" contain a certain amount of both contemporary criticism and Utopian imagining. There is a decided difference, however, in emphasis; Bellamy's chief concern is certainly social invention, while Howells's is just as certainly contemporary criticism.

Howells's book is more entertaining than Bellamy's. Cooke says of it: "This romance and its much later sequel, "Through the Eye of the Needle" (1907), still make delightful reading, since they enclose with the repertoire of current banalities the most exquisite portraits of their sponsors, and give rein to the sort of argumentative fantasy which enlivens "The Seen and Unseen at Stratford-on-Avon", a diversion at which our author has scarcely been approached. At work of this kind he is always in the vein, and never permits the argument to spoil the fun."\* Howells's superiority as an entertainer rests upon two things, his characters and his humor. Bellamy had had in "Looking Backward" only three important characters, Julian West, Doctor Leete, and Edith, and none of them <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ well handled. Howells has many characters; he has besides Mr. Homos (the Altrurian) a banker, a lawyer, a manufacturer, an author, a minister, a doctor, a professor of economics, a New Hampshire farmer, and a woman of the upper classes. In addition to these he has a great many minor characters who appear but do very little talking. In a book which is principally a series of conversations this multiplicity of characters in itself is bound to create diversion; clashing points of view ~~are~~

\*Cooke - "William Dean Howells" - p 234

are always more interesting than mere question and answer. In Howells's romance, however, the characters are well handled. They are really caricatures in a way - type caricatures, delicately done. The most interesting of them is Mrs. Makely, the woman of society; in her Howells draws one of the best pictures I know of the type whose social duties have made them incapable of sustained intellectual effort. Mrs. Makely's distinctive trait is her inability to concentrate on anything for more than one or two minutes in a stretch.

Howells's characters have a close connection with his humor. Caricatures are always humorous. Much of the humor consists in the gentle satirizing of certain conventional points of view in the manner of George Bernard Shaw. Some of the humor is given in connection with the dialog and some of it lies in the incidents - in the blunders of Mr. Homos, for instance, who insists upon bowing to the waitress, shaking hands with the head waiter, and assisting the porter. The incidents themselves are of inestimable value, aside from their humorous content, in making the story move. "A Traveller from Altruria" has even less plot than "Looking Backward". It is also by necessity primarily a long-continued dialog; the Altrurian asks questions and the others answer them, just as Julian West asks questions and Doctor Leete answers them in "Looking Backward". Yet one does not have the same feeling of listening in <sup>an</sup> ~~en~~ a permanent soliloquy in Howells's novel that one has in Bellamy's. Howells had a genius for interrupting his dialog with various entertaining incidents, a genius Bellamy did not have.

Howells is without doubt artistically superior to Bellamy. Yet it should be remembered in making such a comparison that Howells had much the easier task of the two. In spite of the fact that both novels may be called Utopian, one, as I pointed out, is primarily

critical and the other primarily constructive. Bellamy was forced by the plan of his work to go into a great deal of detail, and scientific minutiae are not usually interesting. Howells, on the other hand, was concerned with presenting in a new light material which in itself was already familiar.

"A Traveller from Altruria" is worth reading purely for entertainment, just as the plays of Shaw are worth reading for the intellectual horseplay they involve. There is a certain similarity in method between Howells and Shaw. Howells, however, while he has a keen perception of subtle points and a delightful sense of paradox, is not as complex or as indeterminate as Shaw. A clever turn in Shaw may mean something or it may not; in Howells it always means something. Howells is a subtle critic of American life, with the emphasis on the adjective "subtle". Bellamy's criticism of contemporary conditions is done with a broad brush; Howells's is done with a fine one. Howells, besides being subtle, was well balanced. He had a great deal to balance, but he balanced it nevertheless. He was not a fanatic - a man with a chip on his shoulder, bellowing to the high heavens the catechism of Karl Marx or the theory of Tolstoy. Neither was he a man who thought in large chunks. Hence his book goes a long way toward avoiding <sup>platitudes</sup> ~~that combined Scylla and Charybdis of the Utopian, platitude~~. Parts of the novel, in their implication if not in their expression, are almost metaphysical.

Howells's picture of contemporary social and economic development is dominated and unified by the single basic idea of the growth of monopolies. This growth had attracted attention in the eighties. Bellamy regarded it, as I pointed out above, as the key to the transition; he looked to the rapid growth of the monopolies to justify him in his assumption that the transition was very near.

If the continued growth of monopolies actually did justify him in his assumption, Howells makes it clear that during the five years following 1887 he did not lack justification. The new order is summed up by the banker: "Before that (the Civil War) we could take certain matters for granted. If a man got out of work he turned his hand to something else; if a man failed in business he started in again from some other direction; as a last resort, in both cases, he went West, pre-empted a quarter section of public land, and grew up with the country. Now, the country is grown up; the public land is gone; business is full on all sides, and the hand that turned itself to something else has lost its cunning. The struggle for life has changed from a free fight to an encounter of disciplined forces, and the free fighters that are left get ground to pieces between organized labor and organized capital."\*

Howells sees fit in "A Traveller from Altruria" to point out at length what he indicated by implication in his treatment of Dryfoos in "A Hazard of New Fortunes", that the monopolists are not the men who are fitted by personal merit to rule. He does this especially in connection with a group discussion of the advantages in business of a college education. The banker has been pointing out that a college education, far from being advantageous, is actually a drawback. The author of light romances sees fit to question his theory:

Author - "Yes, that may all be. But it seems to me that you give Mr. Homos, somehow, a wrong impression of our economic life by your generalizations. You are a Harvard man yourself.

Banker - Yes, and I am not a rich man. -----I have suffered, at the start and all along, from the question as to what a man with the ed-

ucation of a gentleman ought to do in such and such a juncture. The fellows who have not that sort of education have not that sort of question, and they go in and win."\*

Many of Howells's best hits at conventional conceptions of society are incidental to his answering of current criticisms of the theory of Bellamy. The following passage occurs in a discussion of the effect of the Altrurian system upon the development of individuality:

Mrs. Makely to Altrurian - "At any rate, you must confess that there is a much greater play of individuality here."

The New Hampshire Farmer - "If you want to see American individuality, the real, simon pure article, you ought to go down to one of our big factory towns, and look at the mill hands coming home in droves after a day's work, young girls and old women, boys and men, all fluffed over with cotton, and so dead tired that they can hardly walk. They come shambling along with as much individuality as a flock of sheep."

Later on Mrs. Makely has something to say about the development of individuality in her own class: "I'm sure we haven't got any individuality at all. We are as like as so many peas, or pins. In fact, you have to be so, in society. If you keep asserting your own individuality too much, people avoid you. It's very vulgar, and the greatest bore."\*\*

In another connection, the discussion of the possible development in America of a benevolent feudalism dominated by the monopolists, Howells answers the criticism that a co-operative system would not work because of the innate depravity of human nature; he very cleverly puts the answer in the mouth of the banker: "I have

\* p 213

\*\* both on p 161

known lots of fellows who started in life rather scampishly; but when they felt secure of themselves, and believed that they could afford to be honest, they became so. There's no reason why the same thing shouldn't happen on a large scale."\* The beauty of this is that the banker does not realize the implication of his remark.

Another criticism of Bellamy's system seems from the twentieth century point of view a little peculiar. Howells, however, evidently thought it important, for he took special pains to answer it. This criticism found contemporary expression in a theological magazine, the Andover Review.\*\* The gist of it is somewhat as follows: the equality that is the basis of Bellamy's system, while it might promote happiness, would not promote moral perfection, as moral perfection is a result of the very miserable conditions prevailing under a system of inequality. The idea is that moral perfection is identical with Christian charity; that Christian charity is itself dependent upon the existence of great numbers of people badly in need of help; and that consequently in a situation where no one is in need of help there can be no charity, and hence no moral perfection. The Andover Review writer concludes from this that the Christian, since he is primarily interested in the attainment of moral perfection as a preparation for the future life, can not approve of equality. This argument certainly has all the earmarks of sophistry. The fact that Howells took the trouble to answer it may be explained, I suppose, by referring to his early philosophical discussions with his father. He answers it through the Altrurian himself: "Have you ever seen sweeter compassion, tenderer sympathy ----- than that shown in the family, where all are -----"

\* p 211 - underlining mine

\*\* "Mr. Bellamy and Christianity" by Anna L. Dawes - Andover Review - April, 1891 - V. 15 - p 413

economically equal, and no one can want while any other has to give? Altruria, I say again, is a family, and as we are mortal, we are still subject to those nobler sorrows which God has appointed to men, and which are so different from the squalid accidents that they have made for themselves. Sickness and death call out the most angelic ministries of love; and those who wish to give themselves to others may do so without hindrance from those cares, and even those duties, resting upon men where each must look out first for himself and for his own. Oh, believe me, believe me, you can know nothing of the divine rapture of self-sacrifice while you must dread the sacrifice of another in it! You are not free, as we are, to do everything for others, for it is your duty to do rather for those of your own household!"\*This speech may be an answer to a rather insane argument, but it does make a good point. The following passage from his own article on Bellamy may indicate where <sup>Howells</sup> ~~he~~ got the idea: "I recall how, when we first met, he (Bellamy) told me that he had come to think of our hopeless conditions suddenly, one day, in looking at his own children, and reflecting that he could not place them beyond the chance of want by any industry or forecast or providence; and that the status meant the same impossibility for others which it meant for him."\*\*

In addition to his critique of society and his answering of the current objections to the system of Bellamy, Howells includes some description of Altruria itself. Most of this comes in the speech of Mr. Homos toward the end of the book. Howells's Altruria is very much like Bellamy's Utopia. There are, however, certain differences - differences growing out of Howells's adherence to the doctrine of Tolstoy. In his 1898 article on Bellamy Howells says: "I should have

\* p 300

\*\* "Edward Bellamy" by W.D. Howells - Atlantic - August, 1898 - V. 82 - p 253

preferred to have the millennium much simpler, much more independent of modern inventions, modern conveniences, modern facilities."\* He not only preferred the simpler millennium; in "A Traveller from Altruria" he made the desired changes. Another change he made was the abolition of all prizes and similar artificial incentives to work. Bellamy's system, in spite of its perfecting influence upon human nature, is essentially competitive; the citizens vie with each other in their work in order to gain prizes and honors. In Altruria, however, says Mr. Homos, "there is no hurry, for no one wishes to outstrip another or in any wise surpass him."\*\* This feature of Altruria definitely puts it beyond the year 2000. Howells, of course, being a Tolstoyan, would not have insisted upon the year 2000 anyway. He was himself, as I mentioned above, in no hurry. There is another point which Howells emphasizes that Bellamy may or may not have agreed with. He tells us that in Altruria if there is any profession more honored than another, that profession is tilling the soil, because tilling the soil brings one nearest to God. This is an American echo of Tolstoy's idealization of the peasant. Howells's transition from chaos to Altruria would include, it seems, a back-to-the-farm movement.

"A Traveller from Altruria" is distinctive for its subtlety, its caricatures, and its Tolstoyan revisions of Bellamy's Utopia. It has the distinction, moreover, of being the only American novel of the Utopian type that is thoroughly entertaining, and also of being the only American novel of the Utopian or any other type that treats the labor problem in the vein of comedy. The fact that Howells was able to treat the problem in a humorous vein bears out the statement I made above that he had had no concrete experience with poverty.

\*Atlantic - V. 82 p 253

\*\* "Traveller from Altruria" - p 295

Men who have actually seen the worst aspects of individualism - men, for instance, who have been forced during periods of industrial depression to beg for bread<sup>1</sup> - do not discuss the subject in the vein of tolerant amusement. Howells did not appreciate the poignant tragedy of the situation. In "A Traveller from Altruria", as in his previous novel, he fails to include concrete representations of the lower classes. His forte lies in pointing out the inconsistencies of conventional points of view - not in drawing vivid pictures of the lower depths. His book is consequently entertaining and instructive, but not virile or impressive. Its nearest approach to virility is in a passage occurring immediately after the Altrurian has finished his lecture. Reuben Camp, the farmer, mounts the platform and announces: "---Our friend here will shake the hand of any man, woman or child that wants to speak to him; and you needn't wipe it on the grass first, either. He's a man!"\*

The thing that makes Howells devoid of emotional power, as I remarked above, makes him also inclined to underestimate the importance of a definite plan of action. He insists in "A Traveller from Altruria" that something can be done; one of the best things in the book is the satire of the point of view that things must always remain as they are. To the question "Just what may be done immediately?" he answers, not what he had answered in "A Hazard of New Fortunes", <sup>"improve</sup> ~~improve~~ your own character", but "use the ballot". Without going very deeply into the matter, I suppose anyone would agree that while this answer may be all right as far as it goes, it is hardly complete.

Howells's work appeals by its very nature ~~to~~ primarily to the literary dilettante. For this reason Howells as a factor in social

\* p 311

1. Like Jack London

reform is almost negligible. Cooke mentions Howells's futility as a social reformer, but thinks it is due to the fact that Howells was Utopian. I can not see this at all. It seems to me that ~~the~~ Utopian, by giving direction to social progress, even if he does not suggest immediate measures, does accomplish something. It seems to me that Bellamy accomplished something. The reason Howells accomplished very little is that his work appeals to a restricted audience. The effective social reformer must reach an appreciable section of the public. The literary dilletantes do not constitute such an appreciable section. To appeal to the masses a novelist must have one of two qualities, practicality or virility. The first quality, practicality, explains the wide circulation of "Looking Backward". It may seem a contradiction in terms to call a Utopian practical. Yet Bellamy in his detailed exposition of a communistic system certainly does appeal to the practical reason of the Yankee workman. The second quality, virility, explains the popularity of "The Jungle" by Upton Sinclair. Sinclair, by presenting in the concrete the suffering of human beings like ourselves, appeals to fundamental emotions. The American workingman is practical and emotional, but not at all subtle. Consequently Bellamy and ~~Howells~~ Sinclair appeal to him, but Howells does not. Howells's subtle critique of individualism is a little above his head.

### 3 - "The Building of the City Beautiful"

At about the same time Howells was writing "A Traveller from Altruria" Joaquin Miller was working on "The Building of the City Beautiful", another novel of Utopia. "The City Beautiful" was printed in 1893, but it was distributed only among the friends of the author. According to Flower\*, there was another edition in 1896. This edition

\* B.O.Flower - "The Latest Social Vision" - Arena - October, 1897 -  
V. 18 - p 517

seems also to have been limited. Miller himself says\* that the book was never printed for general circulation until 1905.

The most noticeable thing about "The City Beautiful" is that it treats the subject from the Biblical point of view. There are in it a great many references to the Bible. The quotation which seems to be the keynote of the entire story is "Lead us not into temptation". Miller believed the chief difficulty with individualism to be that by setting a premium upon wealth and power it tempted man to exploit his neighbor - tempted him to break the golden rule. He believed that in a system where all were equal and where a man's merit was measured not by what he could take away from his neighbor, but by what he could do for his neighbor, there would be no incentive for atavism and the innate altruism of man would be encouraged. This idea, of course, is not new; it is the basic idea of all Utopians. Miller, however, has the distinction of trying to make a <sup>definite</sup> connection between communism and literal Christian doctrine.

The story opens in the Holy Land, where an unnamed poet makes the acquaintance of the woman Miriam. Both Miriam and the poet are saddened by the atavistic habits of the world, and both of them have the ambition to build the City Beautiful, in which men will live in harmony and mutual service. The author tells us in the beginning: "This is not entirely a love story. It is not a religious or irreligious story. It is the record of one, or rather two persons who believed that man is not only entitled to the pursuit of happiness but to the attainment of happiness, real and substantial, upon earth."\*\*The poet loves Miriam, and worships her as another man might worship the deity. Miriam loves him also, but she has no time for pleasant love; her life is dedicated to the building of the

City Beautiful, and her task is great. She sends the poet away to build his city, and she goes away to build hers; but before they part she tells him "I will come to you, sometime". The man, spurred on by the vision of Miriam, builds in the Sierra Mountains near San Francisco his own City Beautiful. He works hard, attempting by his own efforts to build a city that will be a shining example for the world; but the people of San Francisco laugh. In his own conduct the man sets an example of perfect hospitality and generosity; he follows the precept "If a man take your coat, give him your cloak also". But his neighbors take both his coat and his cloak and go cheerfully away. Not one of them expresses the desire to forsake the world and to come and live in the City Beautiful. The poet is not a scientist; furthermore, he is building alone, without assistance. Gradually he grows old and sick at heart. In the meantime his neighbors, taking advantage of his generosity, deprive him of his belongings, even of his land. He is forced finally to conclude that he is a failure. Weary and in despair he lies at evening in the cold dew of the Sierras and dreams of Miriam, and of the City Beautiful he has himself failed to create. Then in a dream he is transported to the city of Miriam, the real City Beautiful.

The city of Miriam is to some extent a combination of the Utopias of Howells and Bellamy. Miller, like Howells, had a craving for peace and for communion with nature. His city is built in the desert, in a wilderness of sand and sky. This location inspires the dwellers to mental creation on a large scale; it appeals to them imaginatively; it fills them with calm and humility. Loving nature and recognizing its softening influence, they stay out of doors as much as possible. Many of their buildings are made of glass, that the influence of nature may be felt even while they are indoors.

As a result of their communion with nature, the people of the City Beautiful are seers; they are calm, with the wisdom not of many books, but of long and undiverted meditation.\*

Thus far Howells and Miller seem to agree. Howells, however, in his treatment of Altruria, makes very little mention of science. He favors an ideal state that is simple, independent of modern inventions. His Altrurians make their living by primitive methods. In such a state it must be necessary that men work longer than they would have to if they called in the aid of science. Howells wished to cut down the hours of labor by reducing consumption - not, as Bellamy did, by facilitating production. Miller sympathizes to some extent with Howells's dislike of modern methods; modern methods are in many cases unaesthetic - and Miller was a poet. He does not, however, sympathize with Ruskin's and Morris's gospel of work.\*\* He wishes to cut down the hours of labor from both sides, from the side of production as well as from that of consumption. Thus life in the City Beautiful is very simple; there is no display - no excess - no hurry. At the same time, however, the production of what few commodities are necessary is facilitated by the application of the most advanced scientific methods. In this way, by cutting down from both ends, the people of the city are enabled to get along on less than two hours of work per day.\*\*\*

Unlike the ideal states of Bellamy and Howells, Miller's city is a poetic creation. The City Beautiful actually is beautiful. The people eat their simple vegetarian repast beneath the sky to the accompaniment of soft music and the dancing of care-free girls. The clothing of the people is Grecian. Then, there is a spiritual

\* See p 213 - Miller shared Emerson's disapproval of too many books.

\*\* See specific reference to Ruskin and Morris on p 202

\*\*\* Bellamy's Utopians averaged about four.

beauty about the characters.\* The figure of Miriam, with her sad, ~~farxeff~~ far-away expression and her flowing black hair, has an epic appeal. After all, Miller is a poet. Bellamy's Utopia is prosaic; Howells's is undescribed - we learn certain things about it from Mr. Homos, but we can not visualize it. Miller's city is beautiful; it is painted with the touch of an artist.

The art of "The City Beautiful", however, ~~is~~ evident only in patches. Miller's art is not balanced; his strength lies in single impressions. Thus while certain sections have power to inspire, the work as a whole is mediocre. ~~Miller's~~ <sup>The</sup> effort to sustain the high poetic ~~tone~~ throughout makes it monotonous. Nevertheless the poetic tone is Miller's distinctive contribution; witness the following description: "Silence, desolation, death lay on all things below, about, above. The west was molten yellow gold, faint and fading, it is true: but where the yellow <sup>sands</sup> ~~skies~~ left off and the yellow skies began no man could say or guess, save by the yellow stars that studded the west with an intensest yellow."\*\* There is nothing like this in any writer I have mentioned thus far, nor in any I am to mention hereafter.

The story of "The City Beautiful" is really to some extent an account of the author's own experience. Miller himself tried to build a City Beautiful on a small scale in the California Sierras, and failed as the poet in the story failed. The poet is undoubtedly Miller himself, and Miriam, the dream woman who inspires him, is the memory of his own mother.

In spite of the author's poetic description of the City Beautiful, he was concerned mainly not so much with the city itself as with the building of the city. He explains how one should not go

\* They are not moralists like Bellamy's Doctor Leete. \*\* p 66

about building the city and to some extent how one should. The story includes mention of two unsuccessful attempts to build the city and of one that is successful. The first, which is given very brief notice, is the attempt of Sir Moses Montfiore of the family of Rothschild to rehabilitate the condition of the Jews in the Holy Land. Montfiore, it seems, makes no attempt to establish communism, merely contributing money and allowing his beneficiaries to take care of themselves in their own way. The obvious conclusion here is that no amount of mere charity can accomplish any ultimate reform; that individualism has within itself the seeds of ruin and chaos, and that as long as individualism remains, charity can be only a palliative. The second unsuccessful attempt is that of the poet. He fails because in his eagerness to establish communism he goes about it blindly. It is his intention to start building the city alone, depending upon the inherent attraction of the project to attract others as the work goes on. Starting on a small scale, he is unable to take advantage of labor-saving devices. Thus he is forced to work very hard. The apparent difficulty of the task is enough in itself to drive prospective communists away. There is, however, another drawback: the city is built (as much of it as is built) near San Francisco. Thus the temptations inherent in the system of individualism are so near that even if anyone did choose to cast his lot with the poet, he would be in constant danger of being drawn back, if he found the work too hard or unpleasant, into the whirlpool of San Francisco. The poet's explanation of his own failure is also the explanation of the failure of the Owenites, Fourierists, and Icarians before the Civil War.\* The point is that it is impossible to communize the world by starting in in a small way in the very

\* There is a somewhat satirical reference to Brook Farm on page 56.

midst of a society that is individualistic. It is impossible thus to command the resources essential to comfortable living, and it is impossible to weather the storm of the first years. The author makes it clear by reference to the Pilgrim experiment in America that the only way to do anything entirely new is by cutting off all connection with the old. This idea is really the principal contribution to socialistic theory of Marx himself. Thus, the author explains why the reform methods of charity and naive socialism are failures. When one comes to his treatment of the successful method, however, it is not so easy to understand him. It is clear for one thing that the experiment of Miriam is conducted far from all counteracting influences of individualism and also that it is carried out on a large and scientific scale. It seems, however, that Miriam herself has furnished the money for the experiment. It is hard to decide whether Miller actually believed that the world was to be communized through intelligent philanthropy of this kind or not; he does not suggest any other method. Then, too, the experiment of Miriam, while it is conducted in the desert, far from corrupting influences, does not embrace a whole country; it is merely a city. Miller may have meant this literally; he may have actually believed in the voluntary communistic colonization of remote and unsettled portions of the world. <sup>24</sup> Miller actually believed in the colonization of the desert under the direction and with the financial assistance of philanthropists, I can only say that his scheme is a little far fetched. One must give him credit, however, for his explanation of the failure of naive philanthropy and naive communism.

4 - "Tom Grogan"

The novels published during the nineties are all Utopian

with one exception. The exception is "Tom Grogan" (1895) by Francis Hopkinson Smith. Smith's treatment of the problem is like that of Hay - only worse. "Tom Grogan" is the story of a poor widow with a crippled child and a helpless father, - a widow who makes her living by doing the work of a stevedore, (contracting for jobs of hauling). This widow is unmercifully persecuted by the local branch of the Knights of Labor. The leaders of the Knights, it seems, are in league with a rival contractor, McGaw, and consequently wish to ruin Mrs. Grogan. The methods to which they resort are, to say the least, somewhat surprising; they set fire to her stables, and later they attempt to kill her.

Smith, like Hay, makes all of his villains leaders of labor. Like Hay, also, he conceives of all members of organized labor as unbelievably stupid. It does not occur to him that even if the workers are stupid, perhaps there is some cause other than heredity that makes them so. He can see no real labor problem at all - the whole thing appears to him, as it appeared to Hay, purely a creation of the agitators. That labor has any grievances he will not admit - and that in spite of the fact that he mentions himself the existence of tenement districts. The tenement districts he explains in two ways; first, too much money lost during strikes; and second, whiskey. Here again, in connection with the second cause, it does not occur to him that a man may have a good reason for taking to drink.\* It is just as likely that the tenements are the cause of the drunkenness as it is that ~~the~~ drunkenness is the cause of the tenements; and the most plausible explanation of all is that low pay and long hours are to some extent responsible for both. Both of these possibilities Mr. Smith overlooks. He is perfectly orthodox throughout. The editorial writer who made up his

\* Jack London has a great deal to say about the effect of the economic system on the liquor traffic in "John Barleycorn", and something also in Martin Eden.

mind for him should be proud.

I shall not go into any more detail about "Tom Grogan".  
 The following description of Quigg<sup>the walking delegate,</sup> is a fair sample of its general  
 quality: <sup>Quigg is</sup> smooth-shaven, smirking, and hollow-eyed, with a diamond  
 pin, half a yard of watch chain, and a fancy shirt, ex-village clerk  
 with his accounts short, ex-deputy sheriff with his accounts of  
 cruelty and blackmail long, and at present walking delegate of the  
 Union".\* Smith's treatment of the labor problem is certainly  
 rather flimsy; it is not the result of <sup>any</sup> great reflection. Smith  
 probably did not take the subject seriously anyway; I suppose he  
 was merely trying to capitalize the orthodox point of view.

#### 5 - "Equality"

It is altogether proper that the last book of Utopia in the  
 nineteenth century should have been written by the man who made  
 Utopia the fashion. Mr. Bellamy published in 1897 "Equality", his  
 second and last book on the labor problem. The Nation\*\* says that  
 "Equality" is not a novel, and the Saturday Review calls it more  
 positively a "pamphlet"\*\*\*. As a matter of fact, I don't suppose it  
 is a novel; yet it was written as a novel, and it is probably as  
 much a novel as it is anything else. The main reason I am giving it  
 some mention here is that it came out as a sequel to "Looking Back-  
 ward". Then, too, in spite of its rather ponderous nature, the fame  
 of its author caused it to have a rather large sale.

From the publication of "Looking Backward" to 1897 Bellamy  
 had done nothing in fiction. Most of his time he had spent in  
 elaborating and defending the fundamental concepts of "Looking  
 Backward". For two or three years in the early nineties he had  
 edited a magazine for the propaganda of national ownership, the

\* p 50      \*\* August 26, 1897 - V. 65 - p 170

\*\*\* July 10, 1897 -  
 V. 84 - p 45

New Nation. In the meantime he was discovering various important matters that he had failed to include in "Looking Backward". It was to give expression to these things that he had formerly neglected to mention, Bellamy tells us, that he wrote "Equality".\* "Equality" is just one long conversation between Julian West and Doctor Leete (both of them carried over from "Looking Backward"). The characters are not individualized. There is no plot. The whole thing is closely analytical. Mr. Flower says of it: "The latest social vision is in many respects the most complete and noteworthy picture of social democracy which has appeared."\*\* The emphasis should be put upon the word "complete". If there is any distinction which "Equality" may claim over its predecessors, it is the distinction of being more complete than they are. Not only is it complete as a picture of the future; it involves also a thorough criticism of the capitalist régime, and also some suggestions concerning ways and means of changing that régime into the ideal. The dominant note of the whole is the reiterated appeal back to the clause in the Declaration of Independence guaranteeing to everyone the right to life, liberty, and happiness. Bellamy insists that without economic equality life, liberty, and happiness may never be enjoyed. I shall not go into many of the intricacies of Bellamy's treatment, simply because they are too intricate. Hillquit could not have said about "Equality", as he said about "Looking Backward", that it merely sketched the plan of a social inventor. By 1897 Bellamy had become pretty scientific. He had developed an interest in the principles of social evolution. That does not mean, however, that he had come to recognize the class struggle.

The most interesting part of "Equality", because it is the

one part that takes up a phase of the subject that had not before been carefully considered, is the part dealing with the transition. As the time of this transition Bellamy insists upon the early years of the twentieth century; he even says that in one sense the transition may be dated from 1873, the year of the Northern Pacific Panic. Bellamy conceived of the whole period from 1873 to 1897 as one long panic due to overproduction. As a matter of fact, this period actually was the hardest the country ever passed through. Taking this view of the matter, Bellamy naturally expected that something must happen, that things could not go on as they were. It seemed that the state of affairs predicted by Marx, when the capitalist system, through the production of too much surplus, was to kill itself, had arrived, and that the revolution was but a short step ahead. With this basic idea, Bellamy goes on to prophesy in what manner the revolution is to take place. The years from 1873 to 1890 he describes as a period of blind struggle for the ideal. It was a period of strikes, and he points out that strikes, while they are valuable for purposes of keeping public attention fixed upon the main issue, can never ultimately solve the labor problem. He proves this by reference to the fact that hardly ~~one~~ a strike out of all the hundreds of them that had taken place had been successful, and mentions further that even if they had been successful, the relief would have been temporary, and not permanent. He cites also the fallacies of the anti-trust and free-silver movements. These, he points out, might also provide temporary relief, but would not mean anything permanent.

This first period, the period of blind revolt, was, according to Bellamy, a turbulent period; but the turbulence was ineffective, because the leaders themselves did not know exactly what they

wanted. Beginning with 1890, however, the revolt acquired more definite direction. From that time on things moved steadily to the climax.\* The first step in the revolution seems to have been a great revival of humanitarian religion. This revival was so tremendous that it affected a great many of the capitalists themselves. The revival in itself, however, could not have accomplished the desired change. It had to be translated into action. The first signs of such a translation into action Bellamy describes as the Populist campaigns of 1892 and 1894 and the Democratic campaign of 1896.\*\* The progress after 1896, it seems, was along the same lines. There was no rioting. The people merely elected candidates who had expressed themselves in favor of the government ownership of the means of production. After these men were elected, the government gradually assumed industrial functions. It did not, however, take over all the industrial functions of the nation at the same time, but started gradually. First it took over the management of large public service corporations, such as railroads. Then it established government stores, in competition with the capitalists. Then it undertook the manufacture of the commodities to be sold in its own stores. Finally, after the government enterprises had proven themselves successful, as of course they did, the capitalists, being unable to compete with this new industrial power, simply threw up the sponge.

Bellamy was extremely optimistic. After all, though, he had some justification. The Populist Party had grown tremendously. The Democratic Party with its government ownership plank had run close to the Republican Party in 1896. It is easy to see why Bellamy should have thought the revolution was at hand. The people in 1897

\* If there seems to be a confusion of tenses, it should be remembered that Bellamy was looking backward from the year 2000.

\*\* During these campaigns both parties had government ownership planks.

were in a desperate mood. After an almost continuous panic lasting for twenty-five years, they were beginning to see that their economic organization was not satisfactory. They were not sure what might be done about it, but they were ready to do something. The public were eager for reform - just reform - anything that would better their condition. They could not agree, however, about what the reform should consist of. Consequently their energy was too scattered to be effective. It is quite possible that if the popular enthusiasm of 1894 and 1896 could have been kept up long enough, the government ownership might have gotten control. Bellamy was not in a position to know that if this party had been placed ~~in~~ in control of the situation its leaders would probably have sold out to the money power. In Bellamy's time labor reform parties were young yet. If Bellamy had lived beyond the year 1898 he might have learned that campaign issues mean very little. He would have learned that even reform candidates are peculiarly susceptible to the suggestions of lobbyists, especially if the lobbyists have enough money behind them. Probably one candidate out of ten will make a serious attempt to carry out his campaign promises if there is enough money in forgetting about them. The circumstances I have mentioned would not, perhaps, have convinced Bellamy that reform through the ballot was impossible; there is no reason why they should. They might have made him more skeptical, however, about the probability of anything important happening in the first quarter of the twentieth century. After all, though, Bellamy's faith in the proximity of the revolution depended not so much upon ~~the~~ belief in the incorruptibility of political candidates as upon the faith that popular enthusiasm would become so intense that it would insure action in spite of corruption.

CHAPTER V  
CONCRETE INVESTIGATION

## 1 - Introduction

The panic of the nineties ended in 1898, the year of Bellamy's death. The unemployed went back to work, and reform agitation to some extent died away. But the events of the next decade certainly **did** not serve to convince the public that no reform was necessary. The growth of monopolies in the nineties was phenomenal; but the trusts were still regarded in the nineties as new developments. People regarded them with surprise and consternation, and railed against the new order in the abstract. By the beginning of the twentieth century the ~~re~~ monopolies had ceased to be regarded as new phenomena. They had settled down into the position of fixed institutions. Men ceased to be interested in the mere fact of their existence and began to notice ~~in the concrete~~ in the concrete their effect upon the condition of labor. The panic conditions prevailing throughout the nineties had made it impossible to observe the monopolies in their normal functioning. During the next decade men had a chance to see them as they were in normal times. It became evident then that the misery of the workers was not merely the result of industrial crises, but the normal and permanent result of monopolistic production, whether crises existed or not. The first five years of the twentieth century were years of great business prosperity. Yet the condition of the workers seemed to grow no better. It became possible now to study specific labor conditions in specific industries.

Just as the trusts had settled down to normal production, so the leaders of the working class settled down to a gradual, scientific process of emancipation. The American Federation of

Labor grew steadily in membership. It was no more a new thing, nor was it the temporary product of an industrial crisis. The Knights of Labor had conducted a single series of unsuccessful strikes and had then gone into the discard; but the American Federation went on. It became so powerful that the National Association of Manufacturers (organized in 1895) began in 1903 a definite campaign to crush it. This campaign was conducted both in the open and also under false pretenses. The organization that conducted the open campaign - the open shop drive - was the Citizens' Industrial Alliance, founded in Chicago in 1903.\* The other organization, the National Civic Federation, had as its object the preaching of the identical interests of capital and labor, and incidentally the folly of strikes. The latter organization seems to have been recognized by organized labor from the start for what it actually was, an instrument of the capitalists for palliating the aggressive spirit of the workers. Far from convincing the workers that the class struggle was merely a figment of the imagination, it served along with the open shop alliance to strengthen their belief in the inevitability of open class war. In the twentieth century certain political opportunists continued to preach the gospel of co-operation between labor and capital, but none of them were men of the moral integrity and mental caliber of Mr. Bellamy. In the twentieth century the war of the classes was no longer a theory - it was a fact. It takes a strong imagination to maintain in the very face of actual, permanent struggle between organized labor and organized capital that the two factions have anything in common. There had been plenty of soothing humanitarianism in the nineteenth century; but in spite of it the monopolies appeared in the twentieth century to be less humane than

\* Really a tributary of the Manufacturers' Association

ever. The time for humanitarianism was past. The first decade of the present century marked the defining of the labor problem on the class struggle basis. The problem was no longer a question of making a blue-print of Utopia and expecting all classes to accept it on its merits as a rational plan; it had become purely a question of leading the workers to victory over their enemies the monopolists, or, from the monopolists' point of view, vice versa. The capitalists themselves, aided and abetted by the governments of Idaho and Colorado, made their attitude on the question quite clear in the Moyer-Haywood prosecution: when one group in a controversy begins trying to hang their opponents for uncommitted murder, it begins to appear that that group, at least, regards the labor problem as something to be solved not by sociological speculation, but by physical force. Class hatred in the twentieth century became so strong that, even if it were theoretically true that labor and capital could both profit by a policy of conciliation, such a policy would have been actually impossible anyway.

In the political field the outstanding development was the new Socialist Party. The party of reform in 1892 and 1894 was the Populist Party, and in 1896 the Democratic Party. Although both of them expressed their approval of certain phases of government ownership, neither of them had any complete economic philosophy. The Populist and Democratic parties were liberal reform parties. They were not the outgrowths of any adequate conception of the labor problem. They were middle class parties, and, like all middle class parties, as soon as they grew dangerous they were invaded by capitalists and political opportunists. They succeeded in gaining a great deal of popular support, but as soon as they had gained that support they came under the control of the money power. The Socialist

Labor Party of the nineties, on the other hand, was a true revolutionary party. It was not a party that any political opportunist who paid his dues could get into; only true disciples of Marx could be members of it. It succeeded in maintaining its own integrity, but failed to gain popular support. Its great misfortune was that most of the Marxists in America at the time of its organization had been educated in Europe: the voters of America did not like the idea of supporting an essentially foreign organization. Anyway, the Socialist Labor Party of the nineties was ahead of its time. The people of America were not willing to commit themselves to pure Marxism until they had witnessed the failure of the bourgeois reform parties. The events of the nineties, however, created many radicals. Men were beginning to see the complexity of the problem; old line political parties with reform planks, and over-night organizations of political renegades from the old parties, began to look a little inadequate. The time was now ripe for a party whose very extremism would prevent its invasion by opportunists. The new Socialist Party was not a foreign importation, but a distinctly American growth. It was organized, furthermore, for definite political action, and its leaders were men well qualified for their positions. Eugene V. Debs was its first presidential candidate, and he continued to be its candidate throughout. The new party entered the political arena in 1900. During the next four years it grew rapidly, partly on account of its novelty and partly because it was the only labor party in the field. In 1905 it was temporarily eclipsed by a new splurge of the reformists.

The outstanding personality of the new reformist movement was William Randolph Hearst, the greatest opportunist of them all. During the five years previous to 1905 Mr. Hearst had conducted through the pages of his yellow journals a long campaign of muck-

raking. What he did in this line was really of inestimable value; he turned the trusts inside out and let the public look them over. But Hearst did this not out of the goodness of his heart, but merely because it built up the circulation of his papers. After the circulation was large enough so that the papers were dangerous, he was ready to let them become gradually respectable - if there happened to be enough money in respectability. Until 1905, however, Hearst kept up the muck-raking pretty steadily; he wished to use his papers to carry him into political power. In 1905 he was almost elected mayor of New York. In 1906 he engineered the strong campaign of the Independence League, his own organization; this league had the indorsement of the Democratic Party. The peculiar thing about the Independence League was that, while the platform it put before the public was radical, the one upon the strength of which it was indorsed by the Democrats was conservative. The year 1906 was the banner year of reformism. The movement died as soon as "The kaleidoscopic changes of Mr. Hearst's ~~POLITICAL~~ political programs and allegiance made it apparent that there was nothing definite or permanent in the "Hearst movement" except the personality of Mr. Hearst."\*

The first decade of the present century was not without its own industrial crisis. The year 1907 saw the markets again glutted with too much ~~produce~~ merchandise, and in 1908 unemployment and poverty were again at their height. As a result, the presidential election of 1908 was anticipated with a great deal of excitement. Every party in the field tried to outshine the others in its radicalism. The Republicans went on record in favor of Roosevelt's policy of punishing recalcitrant capitalists. The Democrats once more shoved Mr. Bryan into the arena and told him to play soothing var-

\* Hillquit - History of Socialism - p 322

iations to the old tune of middle class reform. Hearst's Independence League went just a little farther in its extremism than either of the older parties; and the Populists, back once more, went farther yet. In the midst of all this Debs, riding across the country on his "Red Special", submitted to the voters the most extreme program of them all.\*

## 2 - "The Portion of Labor"

In literature the new century marked the rise of the labor problem to a place in the very vanguard of American fiction. The popularity of the theme was due not to the genius of any single writer, but to a widespread interest in the subject itself. Twentieth century treatments are not of the Utopian type. The nineteenth century had painted Utopias; it had analyzed <sup>prevailing conditions</sup> ~~the problem~~ in the abstract; and it had feebly attempted to suggest methods of transition. It had left for the twentieth the analysis of the problem in the concrete and the more mature discussion of transition methods. It had left for it the bona fide portraiture of lower class characters, and incidentally the introduction into the novel of the human, as contrasted with the merely humanitarian, element.

Howells and Bellamy leave one with a feeling of gentle melancholy; but they do not make one impatient to alleviate human suffering. "The Portion of Labor" by Mrs. Freeman (then merely Mary E. Wilkins) does what Howells and Bellamy fail to do. It shows to the reader human beings, real ones, suffering acutely on account of poverty. In one way "The Portion of Labor" has a certain power that Upton Sinclair fails to equal in "The Jungle" (1906). Sinclair's characters are characters of the very low class, foreigners, who come to America ignorant of the various devices through which un-

\* The socialist vote rose in 1908 to a point slightly above the high mark of 1904.

scrupulous business men contrive to reduce them to poverty. Their condition is one of abject misery. Sinclair drags ~~me~~ <sup>the reader in</sup> into the blackest hole he can find and bids him look around. It is not necessarily true that he exaggerates the blackness; yet his book has about it for a great many readers, especially those of the middle class, a flavor of unreality. It is the old story of what is true sounding unreal because the reader has never seen it. Mrs. Freeman paints the sort of people and the sort of conditions with which almost every reader is to some extent familiar; hence the reader is inclined to have more faith in the verity of her picture.

The character in "The Portion of Labor" who enlists the reader's sympathy more than any other is Andrew Brewster. An American of good family with a public school education, Andrew is an employee in Lloyd's shoe factory. He is not persecuted as inhumanly as Jurgis Rudkus in "The Jungle". Yet his condition before the story is ended becomes bad enough. Andrew's one ambition in life is to secure his daughter Ellen against the possibility either of marrying a factory hand or of having to work in a factory herself. A great many American readers have had fathers like Andrew. Andrew toils all his life, but the older he gets the harder it seems ultimately to realize his ambition. His daughter finishes high school, and Andrew has to borrow money to buy her a graduation present. Then a rich lady of the town offers to pay Ellen's way at Vassar College. The trouble piles up, however, to such an extent that Vassar becomes impossible, and Ellen is forced to go to work at Lloyd's. Andrew's ambition is not realized. Mrs. Freeman's study of <sup>Andrew</sup> ~~XXXXX~~ is excellent; the only study of a middle class tradesman I can think of that is better is that of the father of Jennie in Dreiser's "Jennie Gerhardt" (1911).

The man who reviewed "The Portion of Labor" for the Independent did not approve of Mrs. Freeman's wholesale display of the sort of grief that comes from an empty purse. He preferred grief arising from some less sordid cause. His principal objection to the empty purse was not that it was not perfectly real, but that it was not artistic. Without going into the question of "What is art?", I am sure it is safe to say that if the novel of the labor problem ever does, or ever can, come near being tragically artistic it must be by displaying human beings suffering on account of empty purses. The suffering does not have to take the form of slow starvation. It may, for instance, take the form of a disappointed ambition - an altruistic ambition, if you please - as it does in Andrew's case. Or it may take the form of a barrier between two lovers, as it does<sup>s</sup> in the case of Ellen and Robert Lloyd. Unless the suffering can somehow be traced to an empty purse, however, it is hard to see how it can have anything to do with the labor problem. It is my belief that the fact that "The Portion of Labor" actually does move the reader to a genuine sympathy certifies in itself that the book is not wholly inartistic. It has flaws, of course. For one thing, there is a slight tendency to sentimentalize the characters, especially in the case of Ellen. A reviewer had said of "The Breadwinners", "Of all the virtues that have their home among the lower classes it gives no glimpse!"\* "The Portion of Labor" tends to give glimpses of virtues that are not there. It is notable, however, that if Mrs. Freeman does see a little too much of the angelic in her workers, she does not make the mistake of seeing too little in her employers. Her treatment of the Lloyds is very fair.

Mrs. Freeman has nothing to offer in the way of a solution

\* Literary World - January 26 - 1884 - V. 15 - p 27

of the labor problem. Her book is a good study of conditions; nothing more.

### 3 - Upton Sinclair

Upton Sinclair is the first genuine Marxist in the American literary field. The difference between him and Mrs. Freeman is that while Mrs. Freeman is merely an interested onlooker, Sinclair is actively interested in the emancipation of the working class. Sinclair, furthermore, is a man, while Mrs. Freeman is a woman; consequently his book is more virile than hers. Finally, unlike Mrs. Freeman, Sinclair has a very definite theory concerning the cause of poverty, and a very definite idea of what should be done about it. Sinclair from the very first was a reformer. He published before "The Jungle" three novels dealing to some extent with the labor problem: "King Midas" (1901), "Prince Hagen" (1903), and "The Journal of Arthur Sterling" (1904). By 1905 he had decided upon the destruction of capitalism as his life work. "The Jungle" was written in 1905 shortly after the great stockyards strike. It was the result of a first hand study of the meat industry; Sinclair worked in the Chicago stockyards for seven weeks to gather his material. The story appeared first in 1905 in the socialist Appeal to Reason; later, in 1906, it was published in book form. It was the hit of the season - and probably ranks as one of the half dozen greatest successes in all American fiction. Not only was it popular in the ordinary sense; it provoked a terrific controversy.

"The Jungle" is undoubtedly a powerful book. Without definite plot, it grips one by the painful realism of its characters, its incidents, and its descriptions. Jurgis Rudkus, a giant from Lithuania, and his fiancé, Ona, together with their respective families, come to Chicago and begin their struggle for life under the heel of

the Packers' Trust. The first half of the story is an account of the grinding of that powerful heel, pressing the little group, one by one, into their graves. The cause of every misfortune is satisfactorily traced to something in the great system of exploitation; the author purposely selects a group physically and mentally a little above the average, so that heredity may not be dragged in to haunt his exposition - so that everything may be traced to environment. Old Antanas, Jurgis's father, is the first to fall behind in the struggle. He dies of consumption, caused by the unhygienic conditions in the pickling rooms where he worked. Then comes one of the children of Ona's aunt Elzbieta; the child dies on account of the extreme cold prevailing near the floor of Jurgis's house. Then Jokubas, one of the mainstays of the family, mysteriously disappears, either killed or fled to the harvest fields. In the meantime Jurgis and Ona have been married, and Ona has given birth to a child, little Antanas. But Ona, owing to economic pressure, is forced to go back to work before her constitution has recovered from the strain of childbirth. Consequently she is never healthy again, and before long is slowly ground into her grave. Finally little Antanas, Jurgis's sole remaining hope, is drowned in a pool of water in one of the Packingtown streets.

Thus the story is one long series of unavoidable calamities. Jurgis, after the death of his son, takes to the road. He rides the rods, sojourns with the tramps, and works in the harvest fields. Later he returns to the city, where he runs the gauntlet from beggary and criminality to petty politics. In his struggle for existence he comes in contact with every imaginable phase of social and political corruption. "The Jungle" is an exhaustive critique of the

social, industrial, and political conditions of Chicago. It is an enormous mass of details and syntheses, made vivid by a thread of plot. In the first half the author tells all about the proletarian life of Packingtown and about the inner workings of the Beef Trust. In the second half he shows that the same conditions apply in every field of activity.

The picture of American life painted in "The Jungle" is a black one - so black that it is hard to believe. Yet it is so vivid and has such a note of sincerity and of direct perception that it is hard to disbelieve. Mr. Sinclair has not the air of prevarication: he uses real names, sets his scenes in real places, and quotes official documents. As a matter of fact, there is a great deal of evidence to indicate that if the case was overstated at all, the degree of exaggeration was not excessive. A government investigation conducted shortly after the publication of ~~th~~ "The Jungle" substantiated many of Sinclair's charges, and that in spite of the fact that a mad cleanup campaign had been conducted in the meantime.

"The Jungle" is a great success as a medium of socialist propoganda. Probably no other work of fiction ever written by an American carries so much conviction. It is not only a thorough interpretation of Chicago conditions according to the theory of economic determinism and the class struggle. It is also a very powerful story. Without definite Aristotelian plot, it has real story interest. This is derived from the reader's sympathy with the characters and from the innate interest and the variety of the incidents and details. The characters are exceptionally well-drawn. In spite of the fact that they are used as foils to assist in the dissemination of propoganda, they are real. On the whole, "The Jungle" may be pronounced thoroughly excellent. It is undoubtedly the best novel of

the labor problem ever written in America.

"The Jungle" has no marked denouement. Yet it does end with a gleam of hope. Jurgis is converted to socialism. The last fifth of the book is very largely an explanation of socialism. Sinclair's ultimate solution of the problem is communism, and his immediate advice is "Vote for the Socialist Party".

Besides "The Jungle" Sinclair wrote several other novels of similar nature, the greatest of them being "King Coal" (1912), an investigation of the coal industry. The next best is probably "Jimmie Higgins" (1919), in which the author reflects the befuddlement of all socialists during the World War. The distinction of "Jimmie Higgins" lies in its pictures of various type characters of the radical and semi-radical movements; the best of them are Emily Baskerville, the feminist, and Wild Bill, the Wobbly.

#### 4 - Jack London

Sinclair, in spite of his tragic realism in "The Jungle", is inclined in his later novels to be slightly sentimental. I suppose most socialist writers have about them something of the sentimental. There is one of them, however, who is as thoroughly divorced from sentimentality as the north from the south pole. That writer is Jack London, the Nietzschean socialist of the Pacific Coast. Jack London was by nature and by training a fighter, and consequently anything but a sentimentalist. Not for nothing did he spend his youth among the rough men of the waterfront. Not for nothing did he live the hard life of the sea, and later of the gold fields of Alaska. Jack London had himself been a wage slave in the worst sense of that term; consequently he felt himself definitely allied with the working class. He was not interested, however, as many writers seem to have been, in making his class pity itself. What he was interested in

primarily was showing the workers how to emancipate themselves. London had more pure class feeling than any other writer. He knew that his own class was at the bottom, and he knew that he wanted to see it on top. He believed that the only way it could get on top was by an actual seizure of economic and political power. He was a pragmatist and a man of action. After he had decided that he wanted a thing, he was not content to go on indefinitely merely wishing for it. He wanted to know just how he was to get it. Thus Jack London was interested in the problem of tactics.

In 1895, when London first became a socialist, he was under twenty, and consequently a little optimistic. Until 1905 he went his revolutionary way without seriously questioning the idea that the revolution would come peaceably by the vote. Both in "The Class Struggle" and in "Revolution"\* he seems tremendously impressed with the growth of the socialist vote. In addition to the efficacy of the vote, we may gather from "The Scab" \*\* that he recognized the assistance to be derived from the strike. On the whole, he pinned his faith to the method of the ballot. Yet it is not true that he did not recognize other possibilities. In "A Review", for instance, he recognized the possibility of benevolent feudalism. In "Revolution" he recognized the possible necessity of violence; speaking of the socialists in this essay, he says: "----If they have force meted out to them, they resort to force themselves. They meet violence with violence."\*\*\*

After 1905 Jack London began to be doubtful about the method of the <sup>vote</sup> ~~xxxxx~~. The growth of that vote ceased to impress him.

\* Essay in the volume "Revolution" - given as a lecture in 1905.  
 \*\* All other essays mentioned in this paragraph are collected in the volume "The War of the Classes".

\*\*\* p 9

Before 1905 socialism had become suddenly popular. In 1905 the socialist vote took a slump. Then, in 1907, came the panic. Jack London found all this rather discouraging. Yet he was not prepared to say just what must be done about it. His speculation concerning ways and means he put in the form of predictions rather than suggestions. In 1907 he finished "The Iron Heel", a novel set in the very midst of the transition from capitalism to socialism. The other thesis novelists of socialism wrote either about the present or about the very distant future; Jack London is the only one who chose to write about the transition.\* The chief events of the transition outlined in "The Iron Heel" are as follows. The socialist vote increases, but not rapidly enough. In the meantime, before the socialists are able to get control of the government, the rulers form an oligarchy. At the very end of 1912 there is a declaration of war between Germany and the United States, but the war lords are forced to call it off because of a general strike in both countries. The general strike, however, merely stops the war; it does not bring about socialism. Immediately the oligarchs take measures to secure themselves against another such strike by making overtures to the workers in the most essential industries. The result is that these workers, the railroad men, the machinists, and the iron and steel workers, sell out. Without these men, a strike of the others is comparatively ineffective. This begins the period of benevolent feudalism. The oligarchs grind the majority into the abyss; labor, except in the iron and steel castes, becomes complete slavery. To take care of surplus wealth, the oligarchs build large and beautiful cities. They build up large secret service departments and standing armies. The socialists are forced underground. There ensues a period of terrorism.

\* There ~~XXXXXXXX~~ is ~~some~~ mention of it in other writers; but no other writer devoted an entire book to it.

The socialists, now true revolutionists, carry on a reign of terror; and so do the oligarchs. Finally, in 1932, there is an unsuccessful revolution. We are told in the preface, however, that the revolution is finally successful.

"The Iron Heel" was distasteful not only to publishers and to ordinary readers, but also to many socialists. They regarded the book, naturally enough, as a prediction of the necessity of violence. Jack London himself, it seems, was not ready to commit himself absolutely to such a prediction. His own remark about the book was: "I didn't write the thing as a prophesy at all. I really don't think these things are going to happen in the United States. I believe the increasing socialist vote will prevent - hope for it anyhow. But I will say that I sent out in "The Iron Heel" a warning of what I think might happen if they don't look to their votes."\*

While "The Iron Heel" is the only American novel of the transition, and the most careful of all studies of the probable developments of the near future, it is not what one might call a good novel. It is, like the novels of Bellamy, too detailed. Furthermore, for the purpose of proving his point, London uses each of his characters as the illustration of some definite tendency or point of view. The best example of such a character is Ernest Everhard, the Marxist. Everhard is so thoroughly a Marxist that he is absolutely nothing else. He is the cold, pragmatic spirit of revolution - but one does not feel that he is quite human. The point is that after all, a character is more than a mental attitude.

"The Iron Heel" is Jack London's only thesis novel. probably that is the reason it is his worst. London must be given credit for being the most thorough Marxian student that ever wrote American

\* Charmian London - "Book of Jack London" - V. II - p 139

novels. It is remarkable, however, that his best novels are not incidentally Marxian essays. London himself believed that a novel must be either a good novel or a thesis novel - that it could not be both.\* "The Iron Heel" was more of an experiment than anything else. On the whole, he confined himself to what he called pure literature. Some of his other novels, however, have incidental references to the labor problem. In "Martin Eden" there are a few excellent character studies: Joe, the work-beast of the laundry; Lizzie Connolly, the factory girl; and Brissenden's "real dirt" - the slum philosophers. In "The Sea Wolf" there are several socialistic references, especially in connection with the treatment of Thomas Mugridge; witness the following conversation:

Humphrey - "You've long years before you; you can make what you please out of yourself. "

Mugridge - "It's a lie! A bloody lie! It's a lie, and you know it. I'm already myde, an' myde out of leavin's an scraps."\*\*

Finally, in "John Barleycorn" there are references to the bearing of the individualistic system upon the liquor traffic.

In all of Jack London's work there is an invigorating flavor of reality. Even in ~~the~~ "The Jungle" one does not feel as near to the hard facts of life as one does in "Martin Eden" and "The Sea Wolf". Jack London had ~~lived~~ experienced life, "naked, taken it up in both his hands and looked at it, and tasted it, the flesh and the blood of it"<sup>\*\*\*</sup>. He wrote from the vantage-point of abundant experience.

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 \* Charmian London - "Book of Jack London" - see V.I - p 304  
 \*\* The Sea Wolf - p 124  
 \*\*\* "Local Color" - in "Moon Face" collection - p 29

## 5 - Dixon

Besides the tactical and realistic studies I have mentioned, the twentieth century produced two novels of Utopia, Howells's "Through the Eye of the Needle" (1907) and Thomas Dixon's "Comrades" (1909). It is necessary to say nothing about Howells's novel except that it is a sequel to "A Traveller from Altruria". It seems singularly out of place among the virile novels of the twentieth century.

The second Utopian novel, "Comrades", is written from a new point of view. Dixon attempts to demonstrate the impracticability of socialism. He narrates in "Comrades" the tale of an unsuccessful experiment in communistic colonization. The leaders of the colony turn out to be criminals. Many of the members are inclined to lie down on the job and let the others do all the work. In short, ~~even~~ ~~xxxx~~ everything turns out just as the opponents of communism think it would. I can only say about Mr. Dixon's novel that it seems to me 1909 was a little late to treat socialism as if it were still in the Brook Farm stage.

## 6 - "The Harbor"

Outside of "The Jungle", undoubtedly the most impressive novel of the labor problem is "The Harbor" by Ernest Poole, a picture of the human drift on the docks of New York. It deals with dock-workers and stokers. It is not, like "The Jungle" and "The Portion of Labor", a scientific study, but rather a series of impressions. Poole is an impressionistic artist - really an artist, too. One is likely to carry away from "The Harbor" at least three very vivid pictures: the brothel - the woman and the drunken sailor; the stoke-hole; and the strike scene. Poole's pictures of life around the harbor are made more effective through being contrasted with scenes from the life of the aristocracy. Poole's method throughout

is that of contrasting impressions.

There is in "The Harbor" one character that is undoubtedly the best of his kind in American literature - the revolutionist, Kramer. Kramer is not, like Lindau in "A Hazard of New Fortunes", an impassioned sentimentalist. He is the cynical revolutionist of the twentieth century, the man who has devoted his life to the emancipation of the working class - who works doggedly, without optimistic illusions, in the face of overwhelming odds. The character in the novels I have discussed that is most like him is Ernest Everhard in "The Iron Heel", but while Everhard is merely a crystallization of Marxian doctrine, Kramer is a human being. Kramer is, it seems to me, the outstanding romantic hero of all the literature of the labor problem.

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