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North-Western Spindrift on the Ethics of Majority Rule

Freedom Press (London)

November, 1886

Seaborn. So here you find me up before the sun, though you have fled from your City of Destruction northwards on the night-bat's wings. Your penny-a-liner calls it the Flying Scotsman: but 1, the modern version of the magic carpet, with the seamy side up. Oh for electric balloons, or the wings of the morning ! But come, let us hasten to plunge into the sea, and to meet the rising sun with worship. See, Ben Gaoth is lifting his cloud-cap to greet his father.

Citizen. But I'm shivering. No foot-pans, and this late October!
Sea. What would you I Foot-pans and profits don't rhyme. The London and North-Western joint-stockers know better than that. Their guide to Parnassus is Jevons' I Political Economy Primer'-q. v. But come, no irreligion, pay homage promptly to sea and sun, and I'll warrant your heat. The sunny waves will wash the city-soil out of you, and charm the chill of its inhumanity out of your bones. Then home to breakfast.

Cit. Lead on, barbarian!

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Sea. Now you're clean, warm, fresh-clad, fed, and in your right mind-if that way yet be, after so long sojourning in the Pandemonium of commerce and fashion-let us lie down here on the grass, where it slopes seaward, light up, and talk over our endless differences, political, social, and economic, And first, your pet necessity of life together, Majority-rule.

Cit. About that we cannot differ. It is Hobson's choice for us and all. There is no other way; and you have said it in one word, "necessity, answering the question in stating it, and in my sense too" Unlucky fellow, you need must when the devil drives.

Sea. Quite so; the devil drives, but slaves only, and never the free-born by the *Sea*. We are not now choking in a London drawing room or on 'Change. And then there are needs and needs. Your "must" is musty, let it into the fresh air and open anew. So, restated, let our topic be the Ethics of Majority-rule.

Cit. Shifty and slippery, as usual, you eel. What has Ethic-Morality-to do with practical expediency and need-be?

Sea. A conger, may be, and too much for you. So this sole and sufficient cure-all of yours, Majority-rule, alias government by palaver and dictation of representative autocrats, for that is what it comes to in every town council as well as at imperial Westminster, is immoral, and perhaps irreligious too; in a word, inhuman! How come you to admit that? 'Tis a fell jump out of your last year's skin.

Cit. Ah, in Snakeland we are always sloughing. But, seriously, in London we live fast, and quickest when listening only, as I have been for the past year; and there are all sorts of queer folks talking, Fabians, Anarchists, Social Leaguers, Social Democrats, and the like, besides odds and ends on the casual stump in street, park, parlor, or pamphlet, not to speak of the daily eruption of irresponsible papers, and the monthly flutter of dilettante mags. These two last lots are the delf and china of middle-clasdom, a fine clatter of brittle and broken dishes, truly. 'Tis a mad world scurrying to the edge of something-perdition, you will say. Yet in its madness I have discerned this much method at any rate, a general consent to found

fellow-workers. Let us, then, work with a good and brave will; and still work.

the Atlantic's veil of soft mist-like cloud over them, and have retired from view for siesta.

Cit. Just what we have been doing all morning without resting ! In the clouds!

Sea. Say, above them !

Cit. Yes, astride the cloudlets tilting at the light airs

Sea. Better that than inside them, fog-bound. I'll grant we've been above them trapping sunbeams!

Cit. In very misty meshes! And filching untimely bolts from the womb of the thunder!

Sea. Impossible in a sky so serene. A truce, however, and I promise you we shall come down to earthly concreteness and detail all in good time-to the prudential aspect of majority-rule, if it has any ever so transient and flimsy; to questions of immediacy, expediency, and utility; to particular instances. Oh, I'll sate your gorge for such things ! But these others had first to be. And now let us, following Nature, retire, dine, and rest, to resume our friendly war in the afternoon.

THE INEVITABLENESS or FREE GROWTH -- The Anarchists believe that society and humanity grow and are not made. Growth, not manufacture is their word. Hence our controversy with our friends of the Collectivist social democracy, in so far as they appear to go for manufacture. As Well talk of manufacturing oaks and elephants. it is a century too late for that; this in not the year 1789. Clear away the hindrances-properties, dominions, laws, governments--and all will go well. Only grow and let grow. The scientist philosopher here like Spencer tell us that if there is a tendency evident in history towards the aggregation of greater and ever greater wholes of men and women, there is also and equally a tendency towards what they call segregation and differentiation. These am big words, but not empty. They mean local self-government, communal autonomy, individual freedom. The stars, then, in their courses are with us, and the gulf-streams and trade-winds of time. These will not be gainsaid. They are our

politics and economics upon force. As for morals and religions, the best even of the bourgeois are disposed, or constrained, to put them away (for safe keeping, I suppose!) in seen cabinet of their most precious china, or hidden wardrobe of Sunday clothes too good for use. Ornamental these, or even belonging to quite another sphere. But of this busy "practical" life, in mart, street,. factory, workshop, courthouse, quay-side, Parliament, the base and 11 bed-rock " is force-in the last resort and at bottom, physical even, and coercive. Yes, the last issue always must fall to be decided without appeal by the blunt yes or no of the bulk of " the people "-for I am democratic enough now to throw over "the classes "-backed by the baton and the bayonet.

Sea. Add "brutal" to, blunt."

Cit. If you like. We have masked and 11 civilized " Darwin, yet still believe in struggle and survival of the fittest.

Sea. TO survive under Majority-rule

Cit. So be it, again. There is no other rule possible, as aforesaid.

Sea. What of unanimity, and humane unity of brothers and sisters In conjoint life?

Cit. Sheer utopia.

Sea. The only place of peace and gladness, of well-being and well-doing.

Cit. The place that never was and never will be. Your ideals and moralities and religions are of too fine and thin air for common breath. And the Anarchist ideal is remotest and most ethereal of them all, I Unsubstantial and unattainable as the rainbow. Since we met, cousin, I have been almost persuaded to enter Collectivism. But when there, there I stay. There is no beyond reachable without wings, and we are men, not angels. This State Socialism is the youngest and fairest of the daughters of our good old English parliamentary father of free Peoples and systems of social and political life free in consistence with "law and order;" yet it too founds on "force majeure" and majority over-ruling. It can't help itself.

Sea. And so makes a virtue of necessity I Well, spin on, spin on, Ind you'll soon have rope enough to hang yourself with.

Cit. Never; for, all I've said notwithstanding, I admit nothing.

Non-moral and non-religious, if you please, but not immoral and irreligious will be our new and stable social-state polity, while finding its stability in its establishment upon the one sure foundation-the management, to wit, and government by the most heads in the commune, and the most communes in the state.

Sea. Think you, my loud-voiced light-fingered coz, to give me the slip with this play of negatives--" im," " it," " non," and " un "-upon a background of monotonous dogmatism? Let us return upon our conversation-track, and see.

Cit. By all means, return Your argument ever moves in a false circle.

Sea. And Plato says the circular is the perfect movement. but, of your -race, call mine, spiral. So, to return and advance, tell me, when the devil drives, who drives the devil?

Cit. Himself.

Sea. And what is he?

Cit. Our nature and circumstance, of course.

Sea. And whence?

Cit. I don't know.

Sea. But free yourself to think, as one can think here in the open. Did man never make a circumstance? Did he never inherit a nature, and pass it down again with increments and variations? Picture the age-long almost beginningless procession of countless generations of men and women that have made and re-made and inherited and passed down, with ever-increasing difference and mass, natures, circumstances, customs, institutions, economical conditions, laws, and orders, and tell me I then, where you will draw the dividing line, in this making of the makers of mankind, between makers and made I Doesn't it rather look like perfect reciprocity and reaction of elements-say wills or powers-co-essential and at root even identical? The driver is driven, and the driven drives. The devil is in us; and if the devil-to keep up your figure-why not God too? And,

if so, why not give him a turn? That is what Anarchism means. But how can we, while in our great lone Snakeland, as yourself styled London, we are stumbling and falling over the sloughs, devil-born and self-shed, that entangle and embarrass and even strangle us, and the stench of their slow corruption is so stifling that we have almost lost consciousness of these evils?

The spring and inmostness of all at least that is human-to say nothing meantime of what is otherwise named-is Will,-ill-will and good-will. The Will is the perpetual source of both bitter and sweet. It is poison and antidote in one-self-wounding, self-healing, at will. Only will all together to open the fountains of sweet waters and good-will.

Cit. Mysticism, your old game! Your speech outfigures ray figure quite. What mean you by those dead and castoff skins?

Sea. What but your laws, rules, overrules, institutes, cerements, orders, and your governments of classes and majorities? All the red tape and hangman's-rope of your existence in general.

Cit. I see; universal carapace or shell-dead, hard, and cramping; and you go for a burst-up all round! Effacement of civilization!

Sea. For refacement, yes; and don't look in dismay; for anything with depth, everything but mere surface, is ineffaceable; and nothing is ever really lost, but loss.

Cit. There again you are ranting and shaking your fist at me; but you never show your hand.

Sea. I've surely opened a little finger at least; and your hand is open enough for both of us. Majority-rule, or Democracy, turns its back on whatever is ethical, religious, human, or (the same thing) passes it by on the other side. That's your hand. And here's my fist again: "Not for" is "against," and neglect of the higher needs and need-bes is opposition; and your democracy, an affair of majorities, materials and machinery, kicks against the pricks of real live necessity, and beats in vain against the adamant fire that walls in the world. But more of this later on. For, see-Ailsa and Arran have drawn up