

THERE is, it must be confessed, an uncanny look about that word "revolution" after one has written it. The jingle of the syllables is not a harmonious one when read out. We are apt to think that revolutions do very well for Central America or even for Continental countries, but that for England everything of that kind went out of fashion more than two hundred years ago. And yet if we contrast Society (using the word in the narrow sense) at the present day with what it was in the early part of the current or recently past century—call it which we will—we must admit that there have been enormous changes, amounting to a social revolution, though without the capital initial. By the way, and in passing, why should we insist on determining whether this year is the end of the nineteenth century or the beginning of the twentieth? Why not call it the frontier year. As such, perhaps, it would be specially seasonable for a review of this social revolution. Let us see if we can briefly—as needs must be, postulating the existence of the revolution—determine its causes and

appraise it for good or ill—see, that is, how far the change has been for the worse, and how far for the better.

Confining our view, then, to the secular period of the past hundred years, it is interesting to note at the outset what the year 1800 had in common with 1900. There is, at all events, one point in common, and so important a point as to characterise the opening of the century and make us speculate as to whether there is any occult law at work causing centuries to come in "like the lion." In 1800 we were at war with Napoleon, as in 1900 we are at war with Kruger and the Boers. Napoleon was England's typical foe, just as Oom Paul has posed to many in that unamiable category. Not only so, but Napoleon was then everywhere victorious; the outlook was gloomy, depression and discontent were general, and scapegoats were in urgent request. People were against the Government, while pessimists and alarmists then, as now, predicted national disaster, waiting almost eagerly for another Gibbon to write "The Decline and Fall of the British Empire," or a second

Volney to meditate upon its "Ruins." Garrulous old men even now tell how their fathers were drilled with a view to forming a citizen army that should repel possible invasion. And as the year wore on things grew brighter.

But these are bellicose subjects, and matters of general history. Our platform is, as has been premised, the social one. Looking backwards over the expanse of the past hundred years, we find that, socially speaking, the period breaks up naturally and almost necessarily into the following fragments :

From the beginning of the century until the accession of Her Majesty, covering the latter part of George III.'s reign, the Regency, the reigns of George IV. and William IV., embracing also those revolutionary events, the passing of the Reform Bill and the introduction of railways.

Then comes the epoch from the accession of Queen Victoria to the death of the Prince Consort. In this period, which is one of social revolution *par excellence*, we have as a distinguishing feature the strong personal influence of the Court on Society ; whilst, in swelling the general sum total, we find as chief factors the development of railways and telegraphs and the penny post, with the growing wealth and power of the middle classes—the *tiers état* of our social revolution.

Then, again, follows the period from the death of the Prince Consort to the first Jubilee of Her Majesty. Over this period there hangs the shadow of a great sorrow. The comparative retirement of the Queen necessarily made itself felt upon current Society.

Lastly, we have the contemporary epoch from 1887 to 1900, comprising the Jubilee proper, and taking us down to what we have elected to call our frontier year. This is essentially the modern period of our secular annals, characterised largely by the illustration afforded of social power dependent on wealth, accompanied by the breaking-down of more than one barrier hitherto deemed insurmountable. These elements, though already existent in our social system, have become strongly accentuated during the period under review.

Glancing over these natural and almost necessary sub-divisions, as they were called, we find it sufficient for our present view to take, by way of contrast, the main periods from the beginning of the century to the Queen's accession, and then until now. It will be interesting to glance at Society under those two phases respectively.

In the former, we begin with the Regency, when Society was scarcely in an ideal state, but when there was a good deal in it which the least iconoclastic of individuals must have been anxious to revolutionise. The political lady was a distinguishing feature of this period, not, it will be acknowledged, in its worst phases, but still under aspects which must, as we said, have made right-minded persons, however pacific, ready to forego their peace-at-any-price principles, and ripe for social revolution. Writing of certain social institutions in France under the ancient *régime*, the witty Canon of St. Paul's mentioned "a few women of brilliant talents, who violated all the common duties of life, and gave very pleasant little suppers." It would be difficult to summarise more epigrammatically the power of the political *salon*.

Things remained much the same until the passing of the great Reform Bill. Advance was scarcely perceptible, and certainly introduced no revolutionary elements. Society was still very limited in point of numbers, quite different from what we see now when we obey the injunction on Wren's monument and look around us. It was made up almost wholly of a few great families, some of whom held aloof from the Court and never came to London. Others, especially those constituting the great Whig houses, took an active part in politics—so active, indeed, that between them they practically managed the nation. Society was very exclusive, and mere wealth appealed in vain for admission within its portals. Even talent gave no right of entry, unless the possessor happened to be chaperoned by a powerful patron. The results were inevitable. They were narrowness, dulness, lack of sympathy, political blindness, bitter feeling between class and class, and utter estrangement between the great nobles and the people.

This was the state of affairs which culminated in the Reform Bill ; this was the beginning of the Social Revolution, which becomes at this point entitled to an initial letter, if only in passing. Starting with its infinitesimal majority in the year previous to its passing, this measure undoubtedly acted as a very efficient safety-valve. It shifted the balance of power from the upper to the middle classes, who, for the future, had to be counted on and conciliated. The old order was changing, and a new Society was springing up, active, eager, and conscious of power. Even the old Society had to recognise its existence, to admit it within the charmed circle, and finally to be absorbed by it.

Such is ever the characteristic of social revolutions, which proverbially gain force as they progress. The reformed House of Commons contained large numbers of wealthy manufacturers and other men of that calibre, who, of course, with their wives and families, had to be not only recognised, but conciliated. Hence another development of the political *salon*, such as Lady Jersey's, Lady Palmerston's, and—with a difference—Lady Waldegrave's.

Of these political *salons*, still in strictness so called, the political receptions of our own day are by many regarded as a more or less degenerate survival. Some persons may question the epithet ; but the difference is beyond dispute. These political *salons*, at all events, served their turn, and were, perhaps, only the natural result of the Reform Bill. They were the beginning of the new era in Society, and, as such, mark a definite stage in our bloodless social revolution.

With these dangerous forces working in Society, some strong but undemonstrative guiding power was an absolute necessity in order to remove all danger of disintegration ; and such guidance was afforded in the accession of Queen Victoria to the throne. She at once kept the new forces working in Society from all excesses. Among the elements making up the secret of success may be enumerated, but only in the most summary way, the purity of her Court, her own bright example, and the strong personal interest displayed by herself and the Prince Consort. It was really no panegyric, in the

sense of a mere piece of Court flattery, when Lord Tennyson wrote his well-known lines on this subject :

Her Court was pure, her life serene,
God gave her peace ; her land reposed ;
A thousand claims to reverence closed
In her, as Mother, Wife, and Queen.

The Queen's ideal was a high one ; but she was ready, within due bounds, to recognise the new order of things. She was determined on one point ; and that was to expel from her Court all that was bad in the old order.

It was well that this should be so ; nay, more, it was essential for the quiet and orderly evolution of the new Society—rather than the mere revolution of the old—because the boundaries of Society were imperceptibly but palpably, slowly though none the less surely, widening. The development of railways from the far back days when Stephenson's first locomotive attained a maximum speed of six miles an hour, greatly helped to bring about the new order of things. The conveyance of the mails by railway was almost contemporaneous with the Victorian era, and in due course of time came telegraphs, while the penny postage exerted its silent influence on all classes of the community. It abolished the old provincial centres of Society like Bath, York, and other cities. Men still in their later prime can remember when the postage of a letter from London to Bath cost fivepence, and Members of Parliament were beset by unscrupulous correspondents to frank their letters for them. In the days of stage-coaches these provincial cities had to do duty each in place of a metropolis ; but now the railway carried every one to London, and "Icha-bod" was written over the social life of those faded provincial cities. The great noble and the wealthy landowner had always made their lives nomadic by constantly coming to London and keeping up their town houses there ; but now the smaller squire and the wealthy manufacturer came too, nor did they come alone. They brought their wives and daughters with them. The result of all this was the weakening of merely local interests and ties, together with a more determined and definite concentration on

London. London society became more and more a mighty atom.

With the death of the Prince Consort, leading to Her Majesty's withdrawal from London and from social functions, the tone of society changed, and not for the better. The old restraining influences were to a large extent removed.

Henceforth, what had happened in the old civilisations from widely different causes happened here, from a cause at which none could dare to cavil. From this epoch dates the beginning of the conquest of Society by the merely rich. Mammon laid siege to the fortress, the outworks fell one by one, and then the citadel surrendered without discretion. The progress was slow at first, but the end came with startling rapidity. The golden key unlocked even the most exclusive portals. Mammon ruled supreme. Never at any previous period in English Society has the power of mere wealth been so great; and this fact it is which justifies the use of the term "revolution," though no overt outbreak has occurred or is likely to occur. How could it, when there was practically no resistance?

In the days before, and for some time after, the Reform Bill, the great nobles were wealthy too; but they had the sense of *noblesse oblige*, and, whatever their faults, many had a high sense of duty to the State and to the community. The same may be said of the great landowners, who formed what has been called the "untitled nobility of England" in the early part of the Queen's reign, and also of the chief merchant princes in the mid-Victorian period. The heads of large commercial houses were as keenly sensitive of their honour, and as keenly alive to their responsibilities, as the proudest noble could have been. Their wealth accordingly never degenerated into mere ostentation and vulgarity. All that, or a good deal of it, has been changed. The modern millionaire belongs to an utterly different type. His wealth comes to him from some lucky speculation. It comes as a dream of the night, and very often vanishes like one. Then Society knows him no more; but so long as that wealth lasts, Society is at the feet of its possessor. His wife's parties

are thronged by some of the highest in the land. Her invitations, it is true, are sent out vicariously by some one else; but what matter? Everything is done on a lavish scale. And Society must be amused.

Here one has no compunction in writing the word "revolution." The leading feature of this social upheaval is its blind worship of wealth. The former leaders of Society are elbowed on one side if they cannot compete in the display of Mammon. Birth, talent, services to the State, all have to give way before this new power, which is the more dangerous because it is sensible of no checks, and acknowledges but small responsibility.

This sounds like a Cassandra cry, of course. It is scarcely that—it is no worse than the announcement of a social *bouleversement* and the unvarnished description of its distinguishing phase. The changes need not be all for the worse. Bad or good, many of them are inevitable and result from changes in the national life—they are, that is, part of the national progress.

Nor was everything rose-coloured in the preceding epoch—very far from it. The old order was too often corrupt, bigoted, unsympathetic. It was in danger of becoming, like the legitimist families of the Faubourg St. Germain, out of touch with modern ideas, and without influence upon the people. Had there been no change, no infusion of fresh blood, that order was bound to become effete and anæmic. The fresh blood came, and it is alive—or, at all events, the new order is very much alive!

It is not all we could wish it, of course. When could you put your finger down on any epoch and predicate perfection of it, whilst it was present? We have taken a review of a century; we have contrasted 1900 with 1800, not altogether to the advantage of the later date. No doubt there were wiseacres in 1800 who, glancing back over their century, lamented the changes which had taken place since 1700, and contrasted the somewhat unlovely Society of their day with the splendid picturesqueness of the Court of Queen Anne. But Queen Anne is dead, and so is the old order, whether it be that of the eighteenth or

nineteenth century. Not all the lamentations in the world will ever set it up again. Our duty is rather to frankly recognise that changes have taken place, many of which are necessary and unavoidable, and then make the best of them by encouraging what is good and eschewing what is evil. Poor old order! It had some features which even the most progressive among us could hardly dismiss without a sigh of regret—its stately hospitality, its old-world courtesy, the tender grace of its friendships, the leisured lettered ease of its daily life, when no one was in a hurry, and yet all had time. One might write volumes, too, on the decay of manners since then. To compare the Society of that day to the pushing, hurrying throng which passes for Society to-day is like comparing a minuet to a quick valse. Yet the valse may be the healthier exercise, perhaps; it is certainly more exhilarating!

An ideal Society would be representative of all that is best in the national life. It may be said for existing Society that it is more largely representative than the old was. Unfortunately one factor—money—is represented in excess, the consequence being that other and higher interests are neglected in proportion. Of course some money is a necessity to Society—it cannot exist without it. The exercise of any hospitality, even the simplest, involves a certain expenditure. But gold need not be the Alpha and Omega of our social life; in fact, it cannot be, if we are to keep aloft those standards of good manners and mutual courtesy which, at least superficially, are recognised as distinguishing good Society and good breeding in every capital of Europe. I wish to keep clear of any suspicion of exaggeration. The *nouveau riche* is not necessarily the vulgar *parvenu* it is the fashion to depict him. That he has made his fortune (if he has made it by honest means) is a fact of which he has a right to be proud, and one which, to do him justice, he is not prone to over-vaunt. In these days of keen competition, for a man to make a fortune honestly shows that he is a man of unusual ability, that he has energy, industry, enterprise. Society does well to welcome such a man, for if he

brings with him these qualities, Society will be the richer. It is more honourable to ascend the ladder than to go down. But the case is widely different when Society abases itself before people who have no recommendation but their wealth—who have acquired that wealth no one knows how, and who come from no one knows where—and whose sole passports to favour are that they have purchased a mansion in Mayfair, that they have hired a prima donna to sing at their parties for a fabulous sum, that they provide a supper fit for Lucullus, that the flowers have cost a fortune, and last, but not least, that the invitations are sent out by a needy lady, whose motives are—well, not exactly philanthropic. This is reducing hospitality to a farce and Society to a sham. Such a state of affairs would not have been possible twenty—I had almost written ten—years ago. That it is possible to-day goes far to justify the contention that Society has suffered a revolution.

The great danger of all this to the well-being of the community generally—and we cannot write of Society in its narrowest sense, without considering also that vast social community which surrounds it—lies in the diminished sense of responsibility among the wealthy classes. Wealth has not only changed hands, it has changed its form. In old days, when money was chiefly in land, the owner inherited with his estate a sense of his responsibilities and duties. The great landowners, for the most part, have that sense equally strong now, though they have not, alas! the same ability to put it in force. But the millionaire owner of stocks and shares, who personifies the Golden Image before which Society bows down to-day, has it not. He is free to spend his money as he lists. That he elects to spend it lavishly, entertaining hundreds of people he does not know, is a quaint comment on the vanity of riches; and that people of light and leading freely and readily avail themselves of invitations thus offered is an eloquent commentary on the manners of our time. It is well to ponder on this while we have breathing time. This season there will be few such entertainments,

for the shadow of war still hangs over the land.

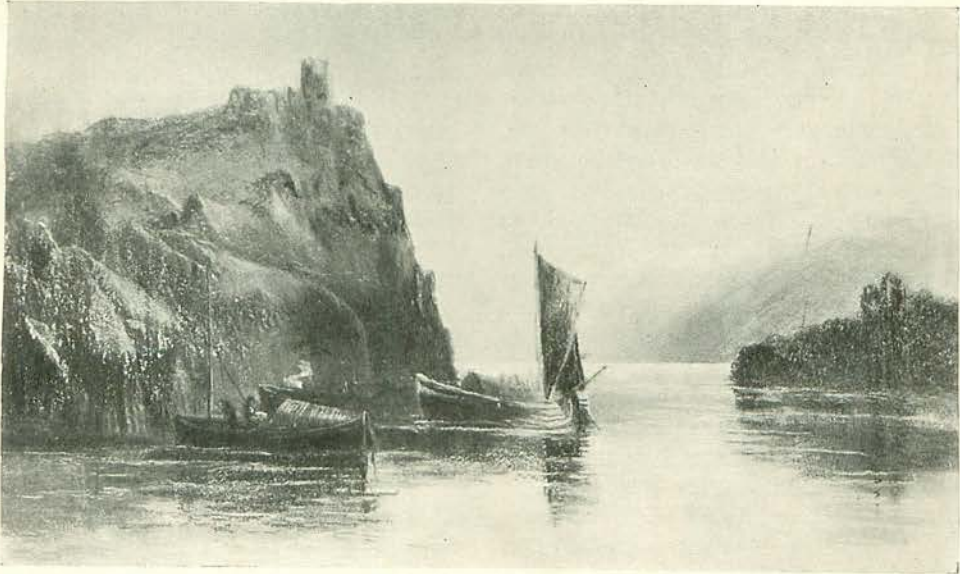
On the other hand, in the old social system the influence of caste was exaggerated—as much exaggerated as that of money is in the present system. That abuse has disappeared. The time has gone by when a few great families had it in their power to sway Society, just as the time has gone by when they had it in their power to govern England.

That former condition of Society was largely dominated by the worship of rank *per se*, which is the most vulgar kind of snobbery. See its records in the fulsome dedications which literary men of mark were not ashamed to prefix to their books. The new condition of Society seems gradually resolving itself into the worship of wealth for wealth's sake, which is perhaps even more offensive.

By all means let Society be representative, and if possible exhaustively so, but in the best sense of the word including all that is excellent, and so worth representing, in our national life, not what is worst. The mere worship of wealth brings in its train a

lack of refinement, a decay in manners, a lessened sense of responsibility, extravagance, and vulgar display.

Yet the picture has its bright side. If among that curious collection of antagonistic atoms which calls itself Society to-day the sense of individual responsibility is small—in society, properly understood, using the word in its wider, nobler meaning—it has never been keener than now. The remarkable outburst of patriotism and loyalty called forth by the war in South Africa, not in England only, but in every part of the empire, the extraordinary readiness with which people have given, not only money, but their nearest and dearest, the willingness with which, if need be, they are ready to brace themselves up to fresh sacrifices and self-denial, all show that, whatever may be the passing follies of the hour, the heart of the nation is sound. And may it not be that the trials and anxieties consequent on the war may eventually bring about yet another revolution in Society—a revolution which will turn it from the worship of false gods, and bring it back to the old ideals of duty and honour and truth?



THE RHEINFELS.

(From an original pastel painting by MRS. P. B. POWER.)