

A REVIEW

Two remarkable books are Ghent's "Our Benevolent Feudalism" {7} and Brooks's "The Social Unrest." {8} In these two books the opposite sides of the labor problem are expounded, each writer devoting himself with apprehension to the side he fears and views with disfavor. It would appear that they have set themselves the task of collating, as a warning, the phenomena of two counter social forces. Mr. Ghent, who is sympathetic with the socialist movement, follows with cynic fear every aggressive act of the capitalist class. Mr. Brooks, who yearns for the perpetuation of the capitalist system as long as possible, follows with grave dismay each aggressive act of the labor and socialist organizations. Mr. Ghent traces the emasculation of labor by capital, and Mr. Brooks traces the emasculation of independent competing capital by labor. In short, each marshals the facts of a side in the two sides which go to make a struggle so great that even the French Revolution is insignificant beside it; for this later struggle, for the first time in the history of struggles, is not confined to any particular portion of the globe, but involves the whole of it.

Starting on the assumption that society is at present in a state of flux, Mr. Ghent sees it rapidly crystallizing into a status which can best be described as something in the nature of a benevolent feudalism. He laughs to scorn any immediate realization of the Marxian dream, while Tolstoyan utopias and Kropotkinian communistic unions of shop and farm

are too wild to merit consideration. The coming status which Mr. Ghent depicts is a class domination by the capitalists. Labor will take its definite place as a dependent class, living in a condition of machine servitude fairly analogous to the land servitude of the Middle Ages. That is to say, labor will be bound to the machine, though less harshly, in fashion somewhat similar to that in which the earlier serf was bound to the soil. As he says, "Bondage to the land was the basis of villeinage in the old regime; bondage to the job will be the basis of villeinage in the new."

At the top of the new society will tower the magnate, the new feudal baron; at the bottom will be found the wastrels and the inefficient. The new society he grades as follows:

"I. The barons, graded on the basis of possessions.

"II. The court agents and retainers. (This class will include the editors of 'respectable' and 'safe' newspapers, the pastors of 'conservative' and 'wealthy' churches, the professors and teachers in endowed colleges and schools, lawyers generally, and most judges and politicians).

"III. The workers in pure and applied science, artists, and physicians.

"IV. The entrepreneurs, the managers of the great industries,

transformed into a salaried class.

"V. The foremen and superintendents. This class has heretofore been recruited largely from the skilled workers, but with the growth of technical education in schools and colleges, and the development of fixed caste, it is likely to become entirely differentiated.

"VI. The villeins of the cities and towns, more or less regularly employed, who do skilled work and are partially protected by organization.

"VII. The villeins of the cities and towns who do unskilled work and are unprotected by organization. They will comprise the laborers, domestics, and clerks.

"VIII. The villeins of the manorial estates, of the great farms, the mines, and the forests.

"IX. The small-unit farmers (land-owning), the petty tradesmen, and manufacturers.

"X. The subtenants of the manorial estates and great farms (corresponding to the class of 'free tenants' in the old Feudalism).

"XI. The cotters.

"XII. The tramps, the occasionally employed, the unemployed--the wastrels of the city and country."

"The new Feudalism, like most autocracies, will foster not only the arts, but also certain kinds of learning--particularly the kinds which are unlikely to disturb the minds of the multitude. A future Marsh, or Cope, or Le Comte will be liberally patronized and left free to discover what he will; and so, too, an Edison or a Marconi. Only they must not meddle with anything relating to social science."

It must be confessed that Mr. Ghent's arguments are cunningly contrived and arrayed. They must be read to be appreciated. As an example of his style, which at the same time generalizes a portion of his argument, the following may well be given:

"The new Feudalism will be but an orderly outgrowth of present tendencies and conditions. All societies evolve naturally out of their predecessors. In sociology, as in biology, there is no cell without a parent cell. The society of each generation develops a multitude of spontaneous and acquired variations, and out of these, by a blending process of natural and conscious selection, the succeeding society is evolved. The new order will differ in no important respects from the present, except in the completer development of its more salient features. The visitor from another planet who had known the old and should see the new would note but few changes. Alter et Idem--another yet the same--he would say.

From magnate to baron, from workman to villein, from publicist to court agent and retainer, will be changes of state and function so slight as to elude all but the keenest eyes."

And in conclusion, to show how benevolent and beautiful this new feudalism of ours will be, Mr. Ghent says: "Peace and stability it will maintain at all hazards; and the mass, remembering the chaos, the turmoil, the insecurity of the past, will bless its reign. . . .

Efficiency--the faculty of getting things--is at last rewarded as it should be, for the efficient have inherited the earth and its fulness. The lowly, whose happiness is greater and whose welfare is more thoroughly conserved when governed than when governing, as a twentieth-century philosopher said of them, are settled and happy in the state which reason and experience teach is their God-appointed lot. They are comfortable too; and if the patriarchal ideal of a vine and fig tree for each is not yet attained, at least each has his rented patch in the country or his rented cell in a city building. Bread and the circus are freely given to the deserving, and as for the undeserving, they are merely reaping the rewards of their contumacy and pride. Order reigns, each has his justly appointed share, and the state rests, in security, 'lapt in universal law.'"

Mr. Brooks, on the other hand, sees rising and dissolving and rising again in the social flux the ominous forms of a new society which is the direct antithesis of a benevolent feudalism. He trembles at the rash intrepidity of the capitalists who fight the labor unions, for by such

rashness he greatly fears that labor will be driven to express its aims and strength in political terms, which terms will inevitably be socialistic terms.

To keep down the rising tide of socialism, he preaches greater meekness and benevolence to the capitalists. No longer may they claim the right to run their own business, to beat down the laborer's standard of living for the sake of increased profits, to dictate terms of employment to individual workers, to wax righteously indignant when organized labor takes a hand in their business. No longer may the capitalist say "my" business, or even think "my" business; he must say "our" business, and think "our" business as well, accepting labor as a partner whose voice must be heard. And if the capitalists do not become more meek and benevolent in their dealings with labor, labor will be antagonized and will proceed to wreak terrible political vengeance, and the present social flux will harden into a status of socialism.

Mr. Brooks dreams of a society at which Mr. Ghent sneers as "a slightly modified individualism, wherein each unit secures the just reward of his capacity and service." To attain this happy state, Mr. Brooks imposes circumspection upon the capitalists in their relations with labor. "If the socialistic spirit is to be held in abeyance in this country, businesses of this character (anthracite coal mining) must be handled with extraordinary caution." Which is to say, that to withstand the advance of socialism, a great and greater measure of Mr. Ghent's benevolence will be required.

Again and again, Mr. Brooks reiterates the danger he sees in harshly treating labor. "It is not probable that employers can destroy unionism in the United States. Adroit and desperate attempts will, however, be made, if we mean by unionism the undisciplined and aggressive fact of vigorous and determined organizations. If capital should prove too strong in this struggle, the result is easy to predict. The employers have only to convince organized labor that it cannot hold its own against the capitalist manager, and the whole energy that now goes to the union will turn to an aggressive political socialism. It will not be the harmless sympathy with increased city and state functions which trade unions already feel; it will become a turbulent political force bent upon using every weapon of taxation against the rich."

"The most concrete impulse that now favors socialism in this country is the insane purpose to deprive labor organizations of the full and complete rights that go with federated unionism."

"That which teaches a union that it cannot succeed as a union turns it toward socialism. In long strikes in towns like Marlboro and Brookfield strong unions are defeated. Hundreds of men leave these towns for shoe-centres like Brockton, where they are now voting the socialist ticket. The socialist mayor of this city tells me, 'The men who come to us now from towns where they have been thoroughly whipped in a strike are among our most active working socialists.' The bitterness engendered by this sense of defeat is turned to politics, as it will throughout the

whole country, if organization of labor is deprived of its rights."

"This enmity of capital to the trade union is watched with glee by every intelligent socialist in our midst. Every union that is beaten or discouraged in its struggle is ripening fruit for socialism."

"The real peril which we now face is the threat of a class conflict. If capitalism insists upon the policy of outraging the saving aspiration of the American workman to raise his standard of comfort and leisure, every element of class conflict will strengthen among us."

"We have only to humiliate what is best in the trade union, and then every worst feature of socialism is fastened upon us."

This strong tendency in the ranks of the workers toward socialism is what Mr. Brooks characterizes the "social unrest"; and he hopes to see the Republican, the Cleveland Democrat, and the conservative and large property interests "band together against this common foe," which is socialism. And he is not above feeling grave and well-contained satisfaction wherever the socialist doctrinaire has been contradicted by men attempting to practise cooperation in the midst of the competitive system, as in Belgium.

Nevertheless, he catches fleeting glimpses of an extreme and tyrannically benevolent feudalism very like to Mr. Ghent's, as witness the following:

"I asked one of the largest employers of labor in the South if he feared the coming of the trade union. 'No,' he said, 'it is one good result of race prejudice, that the negro will enable us in the long run to weaken the trade union so that it cannot harm us. We can keep wages down with the negro and we can prevent too much organization.'

"It is in this spirit that the lower standards are to be used. If this purpose should succeed, it has but one issue,--the immense strengthening of a plutocratic administration at the top, served by an army of high-salaried helpers, with an elite of skilled and well-paid workmen, but all resting on what would essentially be a serf class of low-paid labor and this mass kept in order by an increased use of military force."

In brief summary of these two notable books, it may be said that Mr. Ghent is alarmed, (though he does not flatly say so), at the too great social restfulness in the community, which is permitting the capitalists to form the new society to their liking; and that Mr. Brooks is alarmed, (and he flatly says so), at the social unrest which threatens the modified individualism into which he would like to see society evolve. Mr. Ghent beholds the capitalist class rising to dominate the state and the working class; Mr. Brooks beholds the working class rising to dominate the state and the capitalist class. One fears the paternalism of a class; the other, the tyranny of the mass.