THE SOCIAL GROWTHS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY, AN ESSAY IN THE SCIENCE OF SOCIOLOGY: BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF FOUR LECTURES DELIVERED IN THE FREEMASONS' HALL, EDINBURGH, MAY 1872

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The Social Growths of the Nineteenth Century, an Essay in the Science of Sociology: Being the Substance of Four Lectures Delivered in the Freemasons' Hall, Edinburgh, May 1872 by F. Reginald Statham

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F. REGINALD STATHAM

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PREFACE.

ALTHOUGH references to another series of Lectures[1] are occasionally made in these pages, the author does not wish them to be regarded as in any way constituting part of the same scheme. As may be readily seen, the point of view here taken is quite distinct from that taken in the other case; so that where agreement occurs it is accidental, and where (as may happen once or twice) a certain degree of opposition is observable, it is not essential. Each series should be referred to its own central idea; it being understood that in this case, as in the other, the author does not claim for his opinions any more than a conjectural value.

[1] 'From Old to New: a Sketch of the Present Religious Position.'

EDINBURGH: *September* 1872.

THE SOCIAL GROWTHS OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

I.

No one, I should imagine, who possesses any power of observation, and who exercises his observation on the events now taking place around us, can fail to perceive that the present time is a time of considerable conflict. Conflict, not necessarily of fleets and armies, but of ruling ideas. If we look into a heap of the newspapers that are published day by day or week by week, we cannot but be struck with the diversity of opinions which they represent; and if we regard each newspaper, as we may very fairly do, as the summing up of the ultimate aims of a certain portion of society, we may get a very good idea of the different directions in which mankind are disposed to move. We might divide a heap of such journals into religious papers, commercial papers, artistic papers, political papers, scientific papers; and each of these divisions would again have its subdivisions. Among the religious newspapers we should find, as re-

presentative of two apparent extremes, the 'Record' and the 'Church Times'; among the political journals a position no less mutually antagonistic maintained by the 'Standard' and the 'National Reformer'; artistic disputes would not remain unknown to us; science too, we should find, has its battles and its skirmishes; and probably the only matter with regard to which we should find complete unaminity prevailing would be the price lists of the Stock and Share market, which seem to possess an equal interest for the Ritualist and the Calvinist, the republican and the peer.

The observation of such a conflict, such a series of conflicts, cannot fail to interest us; and, having once become conscious of their existence, the next most natural step is to ask how they came to exist; what they all mean; towards what they all tend? We are told sometimes that certain movements are the reactionary effects of others; that Trade Unions, for example, are the consequence of the accumulation of capital in few hands; that free-thought in respect of religious matters is a reactionary consequence of the follies of Calvinism and Ritualism; that Ritualism itself is a reactionary consequence of Calvinism; and so on almost without limit. And the whole thing, if we attempt to solve it in this way, becomes more puzzling than ever; for we find that many movements which at first seemed clearly distinct, prove, on closer inspection, to contain certain portions of others. Much Calvinistic dissent is found to contain a certain proportion of the commercial spirit; revivals of art are

found to be mixed up with revivals of monasticism; and we are at a loss to know, in these and similar cases, which is cause and which is effect. And possibly we are at last obliged to give up the attempt in despair, and led to conclude that these different movements, which we at first imagined to be cause and effect, are really the parallel effects of some common cause.

Now, with this very brief introduction, it is a theory such as this that these pages are written to illustrate; the theory, namely, that these apparently conflicting interests of our time are not related to each other as causes and effects, but are rather parallel results of one great cause; that they are parallel evidences of one great reaction. Of course, in using the expression, 'one great cause,' I use it only comparatively. I use it in the same sense as it might be used, if we said that the steam was the cause of movement in machinery; without doubt it is the steam that moves the machinery, but then the combustion of the fuel is a cause beyond the steam, and the geological process under which the coal was formed is a cause again beyond the combustion of the fuel. And so, when I speak of one great cause, I speak only comparatively, without implying a contradiction of the fact, that there were causes lying in infinite succession beyond the particular one which is spoken of. It would of course be impossible, in this limited space, to thread the labyrinth of all history; this would be impossible, indeed, in any given space of time. All attempts to

trace the phases of human thought and action must assume something to begin with, even as all theories of evolution must terminate backwards in the existence of something, be it but nebulous haze, whose origin can be neither traced nor conceived of. And therefore, in going back to a certain point in history, and assuming a certain then condition of things, without particularly specifying their causes, I am doing nothing more than is done by the most voluminous and universal historian that ever wrote; and of course, at the same time, I do not ask that these statements should be regarded as anything more than conjectural. Still, though it may be to a certain extent hazardous to assert the common cause of the various movements going on around us, it is much less hazardous to assert that they are the results of some common cause, rather than the causes or effects of each other; for experience proves that where masses of mankind are concerned, it takes a long time for any particular cause to produce its ultimate effect; and therefore we are always more likely to be near the truth when we remove the cause to as great a distance as possible.

Now, as it is impossible to thread the whole labyrinth of history in our search after causes, so it is equally impossible to take into account the infinite number of effects existing around us. We must make some classification of them more or less arbitrary, but a classification which will more or less, we may hope, include all the most important. And, for the purposes of this essay, I propose to divide the social

growths of our time into these five heads—Republicanism, Commercialism, Evangelicalism, Byronism, Humanitarianism. These may be called the new shoots of society; and a brief justification of the use of this term will to a great extent help to make my whole meaning plainer. Of what is a new shoot the result? the new shoots of wheat, for instance, that in spring time begin to make their appearance above ground? They are the result of a decomposition of the old fruit. The grain rots away under ground, the solid useful part of it becomes corruption and dust; but from this corruption the new shoot springs up, forcing its way through the earth, acquiring more vigour the harder the resistance which it has to overcome; at last emerging to the light with a disturbance of the earth's crust as terrible to small ants and emmets as an earthquake or an eruption of Vesuvius. Now, in a very similar manner, have these new shoots of society and thought resulted from the decomposition of the old fruits. But when was the period of that decomposition? What were those fruits?

If we look into the history of European society (and to Europe we must limit ourselves) during the period reaching, say, from the middle of the seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth centuries, we find there is but one word by which to describe it—corruption; or we might say unreality; for corruption and unreality are in many respects the same, being the retention of a little altered exterior, while the internal conditions with which that exterior was originally associated are