Edward Bellamy Speaks Again!

Articles—Public Addresses—Letters

“For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”
I. Tim. 6:7

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full capacity. Instead of piling up the product at tide-water to clog transportation at any increase of demand, and thus excuse extortionate prices, the coal would be forwarded as fast as mined to distributing centers all over the country, from which consumer could be promptly and conveniently served. The price of coal under these conditions would never exceed the figures represented by the cost of mining and the actual freight under favorable transportation conditions, nor, with suitable accumulations at the distributing points, need it vary between winter and summer, or between mild and severe seasons.

Lack of space forbids me to dwell upon the effect to purge our legislative and congressional lobbies, to put an end to stock-gambling in its chief form, and to terminate the wholesale swindling of the investing public by rail road promoters, speculators, grabbers, and wreckers, which would result from nationalizing the railroads.

Why I Wrote “Looking Backward”

By Edward Bellamy

(From The Nationalist, May, 1890)

I ACCEPT more readily the invitation to tell in The Nationalist how I came to write “Looking Backward” for the reason that it will afford an opportunity to clear up certain points on which inquiries have been frequently addressed to me. I never had, previous to the publication of the work, any affiliations with any class or sect of industrial or social reformers nor, to make my confession complete, any particular sympathy with undertakings of the sort. It is only just to myself to say, however, that this should not be taken to indicate any indifference to the miserable condition of the mass of humanity, seeing that it resulted rather from a perception all too clear of the depth and breadth of the social problem and a consequent skepticism as to the effectiveness of the proposed solutions which had come to my notice.

In undertaking to write “Looking Backward” I had, at the outset, no idea of attempting a serious contribution to the movement of social reform. The idea was of a mere literary fantasy, a fairy tale of social felicity. There was no thought of contriving a house which practical men might live in, but merely of hanging in mid-air, far out of reach of the sordid and material world of the present, a cloud-palace for an ideal humanity.
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In order to secure plenty of elbow room for the fancy and prevent awkward collisions between the ideal structure and the hard facts of the real world, I fixed the date of the story in the year A.D. 3000. As to what might be in A.D. 3000 one man's opinion was as good as another's, and my fantasy of the social system of that day only required to be consistent with itself to defy criticism. Emboldened by the impurity my isolated position secured me, I was satisfied with nothing less than the whole earth for my social palace. In its present form the story is a romance of the ideal nation, but in its first form it was a romance of an ideal world. In the first draft of "Looking Backward," though the immediate scene was laid in America (in Asheville, North Carolina, instead of Boston, by the way,) the United States was supposed to be merely an administrative province of the great World Nation, whose affairs were directed from the World Capital which was declared to be the city of Berne, in Switzerland. The action of the story was made to begin in the thirtieth century.

The opening scene was a grand parade of a departmental division of the industrial army on the occasion of the annual muster day when the young men coming of age that year were mustered into the national service and those who that year had reached the age of exemption were mustered out. That chapter always pleased me and it was with some regrets that I left it out of the final draft. The solemn pageantry of the great festival of the year, the impressive ceremonial of the oath of duty taken by the new recruits in presence of the world-standard, the formal return of the thanks of humanity to the vet-

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erans who received their honorable dismissal from service, the review and march past of the entire body of the local industrial forces, each battalion with its appropriate insignia, the triumphal arches, the garlanded streets, the banquets, the music, the open theatres and pleasure gardens, with all the features of a gala day sacred to the civic virtues and the enthusiasm of humanity, furnished materials for a picture exhilarating at least to the painter.

The idea of committing the duty of maintaining the community to an industrial army, precisely as the duty of protecting it is entrusted to a military army, was directly suggested to me by the grand object lesson of the organization of an entire people for national purposes presented by the military system of universal service for fixed and equal terms, which has been practically adopted by the nations of Europe and theoretically adopted everywhere else as the only just and only effectual plan of public defense on a great scale. What inference could possibly be more obvious and more unquestionable than the advisability of trying to see if a plan which was found to work so well for purposes of destruction might not be profitably applied to the business of production now in such shocking confusion. But while this idea had for some time been vaguely floating in my mind, for a year or two I think at least, I had been far from realizing all that was in it, and only thought then of utilizing it as an analogy to lend an effect of feasibility to the fancy sketch I had in hand. It was not till I began to work out the details of the scheme by way of explaining how the people of the thirtieth century disposed of the awkward problems of labor and avoided the evils
of a classified society that I perceived the full potency of the instrument I was using and recognized in the modern military system not merely a rhetorical analogy for a national industrial service, but its prototype, furnishing at once a complete working model for its organization, an arsenal of patriotic and national motives and arguments for its animation, and the unanswerable demonstration of its feasibility drawn from the actual experience of whole nations organized and manoeuvred as armies.

Something in this way it was that, no thanks to myself, I stumbled over the destined corner-stone of the new social order. It scarcely needs to be said that having once apprehended it for what it was, it became a matter of pressing importance to me to show it in the same light to other people. This led to a complete recasting, both in form and purpose, of the book I was engaged upon. Instead of a mere fairy tale of social perfection, it became the vehicle of a definite scheme of industrial reorganization. The form of a romance was retained, although with some impatience, in the hope of inducing the more to give it at least a reading. Barely enough story was left to decently drape the skeleton of the argument and not enough, I fear, in spots, for even that purpose. A great deal of merely fanciful matter concerning the manners, customs, social and political institutions, mechanical contrivances, and so forth of the people of the thirtieth century, which had been intended for the book, was cut out for fear of diverting the attention of readers from the main theme. Instead of the year A. D. 3000, that of A. D. 2000 was fixed upon as the date of the story. Ten centuries had at first seemed to me none too much to allow for the evolution of anything like an ideal society, but with my new belief as to the part which the National organization of industry is to play in bringing in the good time coming, it appeared to me reasonable to suppose that by the year 2000 the order of things which we look forward to will already have become an exceedingly old story. This conviction as to the shortness of the time in which the hope of Nationalization is to be realized by the birth of the new, and the first true, nation, I wish to say, is one which every day's reflection and observation, since the publication of "Looking Backward," has tended to confirm.

The same clearer conviction as to the method by which this great change is to come about, which caused me to shorten so greatly my estimate of the time in which it was to be accomplished, necessitated the substitution of the conception of a separate national evolution for the original idea of a homogeneous world-wide social system. The year 3000 may, indeed, see something of that sort, but not the year 2000. It would be preposterous to assume parity of progress between America and Turkey. The more advanced nations, ours surely first of all, will reach the summit earliest and, reaching strong brotherly hands downward, help up the laggards.
How I Wrote “Looking Backward”

By Edward Bellamy

(From The Ladies Home Journal, April, 1894*)

Up to the age of eighteen I had lived almost continually in a thriving village of New England, where there were no very rich and very few poor, and everybody who was willing to work was sure of a fair living. At that time I visited Europe and spent a year there in travel and study. It was in the great cities of England, Europe, and among the hovels of the peasantry that my eyes were first fully opened to the extent and consequences of man’s inhumanity to man.

I well remember in those days of European travel how much more deeply that blue background of misery impressed me than the palaces and cathedrals in relief against it. I distinctly recall the innumerable debates, suggested by the piteous sights about us, which I had with a dear companion of my journey, as to the possibility of finding some great remedy for poverty, some plan for equalizing human conditions. Our discussions usually brought up against the same old stump: who would do the dirty work? We did not realize, as probably few do who lightly dismiss the subject of social reform with the same query, that its logic implies the condonation of all

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forms of slavery. Not until we all acknowledge the world's "dirty work" as our common and equal responsibility, shall we be in a position intelligently to consider, or have the disposition seriously to seek a just and reasonable way of distributing and adjusting the burden. So it was that I returned home, for the first time aroused to the existence and urgency of the social problem, but without as yet seeing any way out. Although it had required the sights of Europe to startle me to a vivid realization of the inferno of poverty beneath our civilization, my eyes having once been opened I had now no difficulty in recognizing in America, and even in my own comparatively prosperous village, the same conditions in course of progressive development.

The other day rummaging among old papers I was much interested by the discovery of some writings indicative of my state of mind at that period. If the reader will glance over the following extracts from the manuscript of an address which it appears I delivered before the Chicopee Falls Village Lyceum along in 1871 or 1872, he will probably admit that their youthful author was quite likely to attempt something in the line of "Looking Backward" if he only lived long enough. The subject of this address was "The Barbarism of Society," the barbarism being held to consist in and result from inequality in the distribution of wealth. From numerous equally radical expressions I excerpt these paragraphs: "The great reforms of the world have hitherto been political rather than social. In their progress classes privileged by title have been swept away, but classes privileged by wealth remain. A nominal aristocracy is ceasing to ex-

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ist, but the actual aristocracy of wealth, the world over, is every day becoming more and more powerful. The idea that men can derive a right from birth or name to dispose of the destinies of their fellows is exploded, but the world thinks not yet of denying that gold confers a power upon its possessors to domineer over their equals and enforce from them a life's painful labors at the price of a bare subsistence. I would not have indignation blind my eyes or confuse my reason in the contemplation of this injustice, but I ask you what is the name of an institution by which men control the labor of other men, and out of the abundance created by that labor having doled out to the laborers such a pittance as may barely support life and sustain strength for added tasks, reserve to themselves the vast surplus for the support of a life of ease and splendor? This, gentlemen, is slavery; a slavery whose prison is the world, whose shackles and fetters are the unyielding frame of society, whose lash is hunger, whose taskmasters are those bodily necessities for whose supply the rich who hold the keys of the world's granaries must be appealed to, and the necks of the needy bowed to their yoke as the price of the boon of life... Consider a moment the condition of that class of society by whose unremitting toil the ascendency of man over the material universe is maintained and his existence rendered possible on earth, remembering, also, that this class comprises the vast majority of the race. Born of parents whom brute passion impelled to the propagation of their kind; bred in penury and the utter lack of all those luxuries and amenities of life which go so far to make existence tolerable; their intellectual
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faculties neglected and an unnatural and forced development given to their basest instincts; their childhood, the sweet vacation of life, saddened and deadened by the pinching of poverty, and then, long before the immature frame could support the severity of labor, forced from the playground into the factory or field! Then begins the obscure, uninteresting drama of a laborer's life; an unending procession of toilsome days relieved by brief and rare holidays and harassed by constant anxiety lest he lose all he claims from the world—a place to labor. He feels, in some dumb, unreasoning way, oppressed by the frame of society, but it is too heavy for him to lift. The institutions that crush him down assume to his dulled brain the inevitable and irresistible aspect of natural laws. And so, with only that dim sense of injustice which no subtlety of reasoning, no array of argument can banish from the human soul when it feels itself oppressed, he bows his head to his fate.

"Let not any one falsely reply that I am dreaming of a happiness without toil, of abundance without labor. Labor is the necessary condition, not only of abundance but of existence upon earth. I ask only that none labor beyond measure that others may be idle, that there be no more masters and no more slaves among men. Is this too much? Does any fearful soul exclaim, impossible, that this hope has been the dream of men in all ages, a shadowy and Utopian reverie of a divine fruition which the earth can never bear? That the few must revel and the many toil; the few waste, the many want; the few be masters, the many serve; the toilers of the earth be the poor and the idlers the rich, and that this must go on forever?

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"Ah, no; has the world then dreamed in vain. Have the ardent longings of the lovers of men been toward an unattainable felicity? Are the aspirations after liberty, equality and happiness implanted in the very core of our hearts for nothing?"

"Not so, for nothing that is unjust can be eternal and nothing that is just can be impossible."

Since I came across this echo of my youth and recalled the half-forgotten exercises of mind it testifies to, I have been wondering, not why I wrote "Looking Backward," but why I did not write it, or try to twenty years ago.

Like most men, however, I was under the sordid and selfish necessity of solving the economic problem in its personal bearings before I could give much time to the cure of society in general. I had, like others, to fight my way to a place at the world's work-bench where I could make a living. For a dozen or fifteen years I followed journalism, doing in a desultory way, as opportunity offered, a good deal of magazine and book writing. In none of the writings of this period did I touch on the social question, but not the less all the while it was in mind, as a problem not by any means given up, how poverty might be abolished and the economic equality of all citizens of the republic be made as much a matter of course as their political equality. I had always the purpose, some time when I had sufficient leisure, to give myself earnestly to the examination of this great problem, but meanwhile kept postponing it, giving my time and thoughts to easier tasks.

Possibly I never should have mustered up courage for an undertaking so difficult and indeed so presumptuous,
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but for events which gave the problem of life a new and more solemn meaning to me. I refer to the birth of my children.

I confess I cannot understand the mental operations of good men or women who from the moment they are parents do not become intensely interested in the social question. That an unmarried man or even a man childless though married should concern himself little about the future of a race in which he may argue that he will have no personal stake, is conceivable, though such indifference is not morally edifying.

From the time their children are born it becomes the great problem with parents how to provide for and safeguard their future when they themselves shall no longer be on earth. To this end they painfully spare and save and plot and plan to secure for their offspring all the advantages that may give them a better chance than other men's children in the struggle for existence.

They do this, knowing sadly well the while, from observation and experience, how vain all such safeguards may prove, how impossible it is for even the wisest and wealthiest of fathers to make sure that the cherished child he leaves behind may not be glad to earn his bread as a servant to the children of his father's servants. Still the parent toils and saves, feeling that this is the best and all he can do for his offspring, little though it be. But is it? Surely a moment's thought will show that this is a wholly unscientific way of going about the work of providing for the future of one's children.

This is the problem of all problems to which the individualistic method is most inapplicable, the problem be-

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fore all others of which the only adequate solution must necessarily be a social solution. Your fear for your child is that he may fall into the ditch of poverty or be waylaid by robbers. So you give him a lantern and provide him with arms. That would be all very well if you could not do better, but would it not be an infinitely wiser and more efficient method to join hands with all the other equally anxious parents, and fill up the ditch and exterminate the robbers, so that safety might be a matter of course for all? However high, however wise, however rich you are, the only way you can surely safeguard your child from hunger, cold and wretchedness and all the deprivations, degradations and indignities which poverty implies, is by a plan that will equally safeguard all men's children. This principle once recognized, the solution of the social problem becomes a simple matter. Until it is, no solution is possible.

According to my best recollection it was in the fall of winter of 1886 that I sat down to my desk with the definite purpose of trying to reason out a method of economic organization by which the republic might guarantee the livelihood and material welfare of its citizens on a basis of equality corresponding to and supplementing their political equality. There was no doubt in my mind that the proposed study should be in the form of a story. This was not merely because that was a treatment which would command greater popular attention than others. In adventuring in any new and difficult field of speculation I believe that the student often cannot do better than to use the literary form of fiction. Nothing outside of the exact sciences has to be so logical as the thread of a
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story, if it is to be acceptable. There is no such test of a false and absurd idea as trying to fit it into a story. You may make a sermon or an essay or a philosophical treatise as illogical as you please and no one know the difference, but all the world is a good critic of a story, for it has to conform to the laws of ordinary probability and commonly observed sequence, of which we are all judges.

The stories that I had written before "Looking Backward" were largely of one sort, namely, the working out of problems, that is to say, attempts to trace the logical consequences of certain assumed conditions. It was natural, therefore, that in this form the plan of "Looking Backward" should present itself to my mind. Given the United States, a republic based upon the equality of all men and conducted by their equal voice, what would the natural and logical way be by which to go about the work of guaranteeing an economic equality to its citizens corresponding with their political equality, but without the present unjust discrimination of sex? From the moment the problem first clearly presented itself to my mind in this way, the writing of the book was the simplest thing in the world.

"Looking Backward" has been frequently called a "fanciful" production. Of course, the notion of a man's being resuscitated after a century's sleep is fanciful, and so, of course, are the various other whimsies about life in the year 2000 necessarily inserted to give color to the picture. The argument of the book is, however, about as little fanciful as possible. It is, as I have said, an attempt to work out logically the results of regulating the national system of production and distribution by the democratic principle of the equal rights of all, determined by the equal voice of all.

I defend as material no feature of the plan which cannot be shown to be in accord with that method.

Many excellent persons, not without sympathy with the idea of a somewhat more equal distribution of this world's wealth, have objected to the principle of absolute and invariable economic equality underlying the plan developed in "Looking Backward." Many have seemed to think that here was an arbitrary detail that might just as well have been modified by admitting economic inequality in proportion to unequal values of industrial service. So it might have been if the plan had been the fanciful theory they supposed it, but regarding it as the result of a rigid application of the democratic idea to the economic system, no feature of the whole plan is more absolutely a matter of course, a more logical necessity than just that. Political equality, which gives all citizens an equal voice in government, without regard to the great differences between men as to intelligence, public service, personal worth and wealth, is the recognition that the essential dignity of human nature is of an importance transcending all personal attributes and accidents and is, therefore, not to be limited by them. In applying the democratic idea to the economic organization, economic equality, without regard to differences of industrial ability, is necessitated by precisely the same logic which justifies political equality. The two ideas are one and stand or fall together.

Nor is economic equality any more an ethical than a necessary physical consequence of democratic rule ex-
tended to the productive and distributive system. Political equals will never legislate economic inequality. Nor should they do so. Self preservation forbids it, for economic inequality presently undermines and nullifies political equality and every other form of equality as well.

Moreover, under any system proportioning wealth distribution to industrial performance, how could women be assured an indefeasible equality with men, and their yoke of economic dependence upon the other sex, with all its related and implied subserviances, be finally broken? Surely no social solution not securely guaranteeing that result could claim to be adequate.

I have stopped by the way to say these few words about the plan of "Looking Backward" as the result of the rigid application of the democratic formula to the social problem, and concerning the feature of absolute economic equality as a necessary effect of that method, because it is in these points and their implications that Nationalism, as suggested by "Looking Backward," is, perhaps, most strongly differentiated from other socialistic solutions.

As to the form of the story, my first notion was, while keeping the resuscitated man as a link between the two centuries, not to make him the narrator, or to write chiefly from his point of view, but rather from that of the twentieth century. This would have admitted of some very interesting effects and about half the story was at first written on that line, but as I became convinced of the practical availability of the social solution I was studying, it became my aim to sacrifice all other effects to the method which would enable me to explain its features most fully, which was manifestly that of present-

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ing everything from the point of view of the representative of the nineteenth century.

I have been very frequently asked if I anticipated any considerable effect from the publication of "Looking Backward," and whether I was not very much surprised at the sensation it produced. I cannot say that I was surprised. If it be asked what was the basis of my expectations, I answer the effect of the writing of the book upon myself. When I first undertook to work out the results of a democratic organization of production and distribution based on the recognition of an equal duty of individual service by all citizens and an equal share by all in the result, according to the analogies of military service and taxation and all other relations between the State and the citizen, I believed indeed, it might be possible on this line to make some valuable suggestions upon the social problem, but it was only as I proceeded with the inquiry that I became fully convinced of the entire adequacy of the principle as a social solution, and, moreover, that the achievement of this solution was to be the next great step in human evolution. It would, indeed, be a most impassive person in whose mind so mighty a hope could grow without producing strong emotions.

Knowing that "as face answereth to face in water, so the heart of man to man," I could not doubt that the hope that moved me must needs, in like manner, move all who should come even in part to share it.

As well as I can remember "Looking Backward" began in earnest to be written in the fall or winter of 1886, and was substantially finished in the following six or eight months, although rewriting and revising took up the fol-
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Following spring and summer. It went to the publishers in August or September, 1887, and although promptly accepted did not appear till January, 1888. Although it made a stir among the critics up to the close of 1888 the sales had not exceeded ten thousand, after which they leaped into the hundred thousands.

Introduction to "The Fabian Essays"
By Edward Bellamy
(American Edition 1894)

The introduction to the American public of the present edition of the deservedly famous English work known as "The Fabian Essays," is an occasion that suggests some general observations upon the subject of socialism, considered especially from the American point of view.

Until very recently socialism has been a word rarely heard in the United States, and still more rarely understood, even among intelligent persons. Till quite lately the average American has conceived of a socialist, when he has considered him at all, as a mysterious type of desperado, reputed to infest the dark places of continental Europe and engaged with his fellows in a conspiracy as monstrous as it was futile, against civilization and all that it implied. That such an atrocious and hopeless undertaking should find any following of sane men, has seemed accountable only by the oppressions of European despots and their maddening effect on the popular mind. That socialism could never take root in a republic like ours was assumed as an axiom. Though it might be well enough for Americans to study the phenomena of socialism, in a philosophic and purely speculative way, as a disease of monarchical systems, any one would have been laughed at who should have suggested ten years ago that the subject would ever have a practical interest to our people.