

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OU_220245

UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 331/386W Accession No. 6662

Author Stocker, R. D.

Title What's Wrong with the Middle
Classes ? 1919.

This book should be returned on or before the date
last marked below.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

BY

R. DIMSDALE STOCKER

Author of "From Warfare to Welfare," etc.

LONDON:

CECIL PALMER & HAYWARD
Oakley House, Bloomsbury Street, W.C.]

F I R S T
E D I T I O N
1 9 1 9
COPY
RIGHT

PREFACE.

AS the object of this book may be less obvious to the reader than it appears to the author, a prefatory word may be necessary. It is about the Middle Classes, and it is addressed to them. But it is more than doubtful whether, unless it should fall into their hands in a moment of absent-mindedness, they will be induced to read it. For they will probably regard it as an attempt to perpetrate a joke at their expense. It is, however, nothing of the kind.

The author still has faith in the Middle Class, or, at least, in many persons who claim to belong to it, and he is firmly convinced that the Middle Class is indispensable to the community. A place has been prepared for them, and if only they are wise they will accept it and make the best use of it. But before they can do this they must make quite sure of themselves.

As it is, many Middle-class persons have lost faith in their mission. They are under the impression that they are not wanted. It is only their money, they think, that people are after. But this delusion must be dispelled. What is of far greater importance to everybody than money nowadays is brains. And the Middle Classes have brains if only they will use them. They have also culture and leisure. And if they can be induced to realise that these things are enhanced in proportion as they are shared with others and become the common property of everybody else, they will discover something that will prove of permanent value to all.

The *Middle class* is needed to-day as it has never been

PREFACE.

before. Labour, in particular, stands in need of the thought which only those who have had the requisite leisure can afford to give. And if the Middle Class can demonstrate that its cause is fundamentally identical with that of Labour itself, it will have every reason to feel proud of its achievement. To be in the position to do this, however, it must be prepared to disavow its connection with the Property Defence League, and show that it is willing to stand for what it is rather than for what it has.

Apparently the Middle Class are showing themselves to be capable of this. For the recent attempts which have been made to organise the professional classes have resulted in the adoption of the Trade Union principle by doctors, nurses, teachers, clerks, and actors, all of whom have given proof of the value of effective organised power. Moreover, during a recent strike of the employees of the Borough Engineer's Department in Kensington, a number of the local inhabitants volunteered to act as workers and so carry on the necessary public services. These facts warrant the inference that the Middle Class is capable of other things than merely protecting its so-called interests, and that it may be actuated by a high ideal of service.

Only let it keep clear of stunts. And, above all, let it remember that the man who refuses to take its conventionality, its snobbishness, and its hypocrisy in a serious light is, after all, its truest friend.

One word should be said as to the materials for the historic portion of this book. Here the author desires to acknowledge his profound indebtedness to the excellent volume, "The English Middle Class," by Mr. R. H. Gretton. Had it not been for that work it is doubtful whether this book would ever have been written, for otherwise the author would never have realised the serious nature

PREFACE.

of the problem. He is under a deep debt to Mr. Gretton, and begs to offer his sincere apologies for having laid the book under such contribution. His excuse must be, however, that had this not been so the reader might have been led to suspect that the whole theory of the Middle Class as presented by the present writer was a myth. As it is, in view of the appeal to history, no such objection can be raised. The facts are there, and they must speak for themselves.

R. D. S.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
"Class"—In General - ~ ~ ~ ~	11
The Middle Class in Particular ~ ~	16
The Middle Class in History - ~ ~	23
Contemporary Middle-class Life and Ideals - ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~	40

Printed by the
VICTORIA HOUSE PRINTING CO., LTD.,
Tudor Street, E.C.4.

" CLASS "—IN GENERAL.

THE term " class " is a most vague and misleading one. For instance, it may be applied, as it often is, to a person whose social grade is assumed to be of a superior order. To tell a man that he is " no class " is tantamount to telling him that he is an " outsider." The " classes " hitherto have invariably been contrasted with the " masses/" to the decided disadvantage of the latter. To be unclassed, or unclassifiable, has been one of the greatest misfortunes that could befall one.

Nevertheless, tremendous changes have taken place in our conception of the class question. It has almost become a problem. In point of fact, it appears to a great many people to be one of the greatest of problems. Though we still speak of the " classes," we realise that these have undergone the most amazing transformation. The " masses" are no longer beyond the pale of "class": they have become " class-conscious." And this fact threatens to be a very serious matter indeed.

In these democratic times we are accustomed to hear a good deal said about the "class war." What this really involves very few people know. But " class " has always made a tremendous impression upon them. At heart most people are snobs, and the prospect of the " masses " being in a position to reverse the order of things, to turn the tables upon the " upper ten" and to collar not only the wealth, but what little prestige is left into the bargain, fills them with dismay. At least, they exclaim, let us have a remnant of real propriety, as well as property, left. Let us make a stand for our principles,

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

as well as our interests. Let us combine. Let the State give us a lead and we will humbly follow.

This plausible argument is evidently running in the heads of a good many people to-day, who have been informed of the existence of the "Middle Class Union." The Middle Class has been taken at a disadvantage. It has always taken itself for granted. It did not advertise. It modestly preferred to remain quietly among the undetected part of the community. Nobody heard of its existence unless its "rights" were unduly assailed; and even then it had acquired an enviable reputation for patience and forbearance. Its passion for respectability, for conforming to law and order, and for observing the proprieties of "polite society," rendered it a passive rather than an active agent in the body politic. Its watchword was gentility; and it invariably contrived to avoid the charge of being an aggressive or clamorous class. It had its detractors, indeed, who hinted that it was meanspirited and cowardly; while some libellously declared that it was a drag upon the social system. But its habitual composure and good sense led it to refrain from exhibiting the unseemly vulgarity that would have been necessary to have rebutted the charge. It suffered in uncomplaining silence.

But even the worm will turn. And the Middle Class, in view of recent events, and especially in view of the warnings it has received of the nefarious designs of the Bolsheviks in Russia and the Spartacists in Germany, has at length realised that it is high time to bestir itself.

Why it should thus suddenly have decided to take the advice of its counsellors may call for a word or two of further explanation. So let us explain. The Middle Class, numerically speaking, is a comparatively large class. It embraces not only the professional classes, but

" CLASS "- I N GENERAL.

practically all those **who** have " a stake in the country." If you have anything to lose except your job, you may depend upon it you are a member of the Middle Class. Should you be a doctor, or a clergyman, or a lawyer, your class goes without saying. Nor in these days does one ever dream of excluding people on the grounds that their vocation may be " business" or "pleasure." Artists, photographers, insurance agents, grocers, bankers, publicans and brewers are all equally eligible for admission. Even actors and actresses, who were once no better than rogues and vagabonds, as members of " the " profession, are of course entitled to claim a place in the great Middle Class. Whereas, in bygone times, the Middle Class prided itself upon its exclusiveness, it now becomes evident that its essential claim must consist in its inclusiveness.

This fact, however, consoling as it may appear to the more prosperous section of the Middle Class, is scarcely conducive to the spiritual equanimity of what have hitherto been its most "representative" members. The Middle Class to-day is obviously of far too heterogeneous a character to conform to any precise standard. And though we may say, as somebody said recently, that a Middle-class person is one who undertakes to defray the expenses of his children's education, it is not very clear that the unpalatable truth that the Middle Class is of economic origin, will be calculated to appeal to Middle-class susceptibilities. For all that, as we shall see, unless we accept an economic criterion, it remains impossible to distinguish the Middle Class at all. Unless we exclude, on the one hand, the genuine aristocracy, whose indigence is too apparent to require comment, and, on the other hand, the railwaymen, the transport workers and the miners, we shall never be able to determine the Middle-class person. The line must be drawn somewhere. It

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

may be an imaginary line, like the Equator. But there it is. And unless we accept the basis of economic independence as the test, we shall fail to discover any objective validity for our inquiry.

As a matter of fact, no reasonably-minded Middle-class person will quarrel with this test. At bottom, he realises only too well that whatever he may have to lose is mostly of a material kind. His tastes, sympathies, knowledge and skill cannot be taken from him by force. And no threat of revolution can convince him that he need have cause to fear the prospect of being deprived of these things. What he dreads in the event of any catastrophe which might come by way of Russia is the collapse of the relatively favourable conditions to which he has been accustomed, and in virtue of which he and his kind have been permitted to enjoy a tolerable, if not luxurious, existence. This is but natural. But the assumption that he is entitled to this by reason of some mysterious spiritual affinity therewith, is unwarranted, to say the least. Let the Middle Class but be honest with themselves, and they will find that their attitude to life in general is dictated by a rigid sense of economic superiority, and that their real problem is to discover how far and by what means this can be reconciled with human necessity at large.

At the moment, however, the Middle-class mind appears to be incapable of thought. This is not surprising. To a class that has been accustomed to have its existence ordered by precedent, nothing is more difficult than the cultivation of mental resourcefulness. That is the case to-day. The Middle Class is at its wits' end; and, being at the end of its own wits, it naturally imagines that the world must be at an end also. It believed heart and soul in the good old way. The good old way it believed was

"CLASS " - I N GENERAL.

destined to endure to all eternity. The good old way meant that the few should impress the many. This it accepted as a revealed truth. But the proposition that the many should impress everybody, it protests against with unmeasured vehemence. The bad new way, by exalting the Masses, would make an end of everything.

But there are exceptions, and notable exceptions, to this. And even as good a bourgeois as M. Clemenceau appears to be willing to make certain concessions in favour of a new " class basis " for society. At a Congress of State employees, held recently in France, he is reported to have said: " I find your aspirations legitimate. In 1789 an unworthy nobility was wrecked. To-day the Middle Classes have shown themselves incapable of rising to the level demanded by the occasion. The moment has come for you to follow in the due order of succession."

It may be doubted whether the average bourgeois is as sound an evolutionist as M. Clemenceau. And even if he should prove himself to be so, his conception of evolution is not unlikely to assume the aspect of a ferocious struggle between himself and his species, which will lead him fallaciously to believe that, if the Middle Classes are to go down in the evolutionary process, they had best go down fighting. But that will at once betray them as believers not in evolution but in revolution. Whether meantime they will see fit to revise their scientific conceptions and before forming their opinions be at the pains of informing their minds, remains to be seen.

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN PARTICULAR.

SO far we have been dealing with generalities. It now remains to approach the Middle-class question in detail. What actually constitutes a person a Middle-class man or woman, as we have already inferred, is his economic position. And if this inference is correct, many of the motives which are likely to animate him may be deduced with comparative ease.

There are, however, a good many illusions of which it may be as well to attempt to dispose at the outset. As a rule, your out-and-out Middle-class individual is a Romantic. Realism he scorns. Facts, judiciously selected, he will accept, though seldom with close examination. Accordingly, his ideas both of himself and of the Universe form a world more or less peculiar to himself.

To say that the Middle-class person is impervious to the conditions about him would be to utter an untruth. To do him justice, he is as progressive as other people. For example, of recent years, with characteristic modesty he has adapted his attire to suit modern circumstances. Formerly, the top-hat and frock-coat, which were the authentic seal and sign of Middle-class respectability, were universally adopted at great personal inconvenience by this long-suffering folk. But times have changed ; and though it might be an overstatement to say that the Middle Class had devised a new mode of apparel, they have at least, with their abhorrence for making themselves conspicuous

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN PARTICULAR.

or singular, discarded the old. In this way, then, we may say that they are conservative, with liberal aspirations. In the eyes of many, indeed, the disappearance of these once-honoured emblems of gentility might be construed as symptomatic of the decay of the Middle Class itself. Such, however, is not the case. If the Middle Class is outwardly less conscious of itself, less self-contained, more adaptable and prepared to march with the times, it only displays its good sense and preference for a maximum of genuine comfort.

But we must not conclude from this that, because it has surrendered something of its old dignity, it is therefore inclined to let itself down in any way. Its idealism still clings to it, and proof of this is forthcoming in every Middle-class household, church, chapel, or public school. As a Middle-class individual, I remember the atmosphere in which I was brought up. A good deal was said about the necessity of behaving in a becomingly "gentlemanly manner," and I was further indoctrinated with the idea that the Great Middle Class to which I had the privilege of belonging had a monopoly of every conceivable virtue under the sun. It was the veritable salt of the earth, whose properties were Thrift, Industry, and Common Sense. Associated with these virtues were others. But Thrift, Industry, and Common Sense predominated.

The effect of a Middle-class upbringing upon a child is unmistakable. Practically it amounts to this: that life must be regulated by a rigid regard to one's parents' income: that what can be "afforded" one is entitled to have, and that what would in any way outrage the fair economic proportions of the Family Exchequer must be dispensed with. Further, one must be prepared to make up one's mind to be a more or less useful member of society, and the sooner one learns to conform to the tradi-

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

tional requirements of the family in this respect **the** better. **Common** sense follows as a matter of course.

Whether it can fairly be argued that Middle-class life in **the** main is fundamentally different from that of the other classes may be doubted. The Middle-class person, so **far** as I am aware, eats only one dinner as a rule, wears only one shirt, and lives in only one house at a time. But, it must be confessed, he usually gets these; and as a rule his supper awaits him in the larder, his last week's linen is at the wash, and he may spend his week-ends either in lodgings or at an hotel if he chooses. One thing, therefore, is evident: the ingredients of Middle-class existence provide special facilities for the normal discharge of the activities which are appropriate to mankind. To be relieved from the pangs of hunger is manifestly conducive to one's welfare. Cleanliness is next to godliness, and a very good second, too. While to demonstrate that one's home is one's castle is to uphold one of the most sacred privileges of social existence. Middle-class existence may not always be ideal. It is not. It may have its limitations. It has. At any rate, it enjoys the happiest combination of advantages. Hence it is well worth while deciding whether it is not an institution deserving of perpetuation, the only question being, how this is to be achieved.

Recently, indeed, the gravity of the situation has been brought home to the Middle Classes themselves. They have been told that their term of existence is at an end: **that** not only profiteers, but anarchists and syndicalists as well, have determined to exterminate them, and that, unless they are prepared to make frantic efforts to save **their** substance, their dwelling places, their linen, and their **own** skins, they will certainly go under. The Middle Class Union has said it. And the Middle Class has "got the

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN PARTICULAR.

wind up." At the eleventh hour it realises that it is faced with the most terrible catastrophe. But it still has hopes of salvation.

The Middle Class, it is alleged, stands especially in need of one thing. That is, organisation. It must take a leaf out of the book of Labour and Capital. Capital is organised. Labour is organised. But the Middle Class is destitute of effective organisation. Consequently it is powerless to resist the encroachments of Capital and Labour.

Capital, it appears, is desirous of abolishing the Middle Classes because they are " too nearly akin " to it. They are a sort of poor relation, who run the risk of being treated very shabbily. The Middle Class, indeed, is endowed with sufficient intelligence " to criticise Capital and its use," and sufficiently thrifty "to take the place of Capital in a great emergency." In fact, it turns out that the Middle Class provides the greater part of the capital that goes to make the Capitalist. It is the goose that lays the golden eggs. But the eggs, it seems, are mysteriously incubated by a process outside its control. Labour, on the other hand, has set its heart on abolishing the Middle Class owing to "its fear of the patriotism and loyalty " of this noble, self-sacrificing section of the community. All this is to be deplored. At whatever cost, the Middle Class must somehow survive. On constitutional grounds, it must be protected. Not only is it economically more wealthy than Capital, it is also numerically stronger than adult Labour. Moreover, socially and intellectually it is superior, we learn, to either Capital or Labour.

These observations, which are quoted from the publications of the Middle Class league are well worthy of consideration. And we may turn to see what light they shed upon our problem.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

In the first place, there is undeniable truth that the Middle Class stands in need of organisation. There can be no doubt about this. Its economic conceptions call for serious consideration. Its theory of competitive individualism needs to be carefully scrutinised. Professedly basing its claim upon "economic independence/" it has jealously stood for personal and family rights. But while it has defended and justified these, it has failed altogether to show how they could be guaranteed or maintained unless another principle were granted as a preliminary. This principle is the greater principle of "social economic dependence." In its anxiety to make sure of the family and the individual, it proceeded to draw an imaginary circle round them. This it drew closer and closer, with the object of excluding everybody else. In the end it has succeeded in almost strangling itself. Its assumption has been that the wealth amassed and inherited by it was its absolute possession. There could be no wealth unless it belonged to somebody. Its value and usefulness, apart from this fact, was a secondary consideration. Who was to get it was the question.

If the Middle Class, therefore, has got itself in the clutches of Capital, it has only itself to thank. Its exploitation has been the result of its own delusion. It has been beaten at its own game. Its victimisation may have been involuntary, but it was always involved in the Middle-class assumption. What it took, another could take. Besides, the Middle Class has always insisted on "paying its way." You made your way by payment I To "stump up" when the hour of settlement arrived was a point of honour. Moreover, everything had an equivalent in money. The price of some things might be high, but if only the requisite sum in cash could be raised they could be purchased and owned. In reality, therefore, the much-

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN PARTICULAR.

maligned Capitalist system, whose alleged design on the " Middle Class " is now indignantly challenged, has been the very system that the Middle Class has done its utmost to maintain. Unless this were so, indeed, how could it be that, as Middle-class champions declare, the Middle Class is richer than the Capitalist himself? Superficially, this statement savours of the nonsensical, but like many such statements it embodies a paradox that contains the profoundest of truths. Its apparent contradiction, by the way, will be found to be due to two facts: (1) that the economics of the Middle Class have tended in the main to concentrate wealth in the hands of the few rather than to distribute it in the hands of the many; and (2) that the plutocratic sections of the Middle Class have become an increasingly parasitic class, which, however, has not prevented the Middle Class from playing into their hands nor from actually identifying themselves with the plutocracy whenever they were able.

We shall be told, of course, that the fair tradition of the Middle Class is entirely opposed to all this, and that whatever success it may have enjoyed was due to its industrious habits, its frugality, and practical good sense. Plutocracy, it will be said, is only a recent excrescence upon the immaculate exterior of Middle-class life, and should not be regarded as typical of it. Here, however, let me reply that we may do well to suspend our judgment. In the course of the following chapter we will appeal to history and see whether the Middle Class can be absolved from the charge which has been implied by our admissions.

Meanwhile, let us dwell for a moment or two upon a few more statements which are made on the authority of the writer whom we have cited. Having distinguished between the Capitalist, Labour, and the Middle Classes to his complete satisfaction, he proceeds to inform us that

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

the Middle Class is, unfortunately, " diverse in its objects, frequently opposed in its interests, individual in its efforts, and incoherent in its expression " ; adding that " we would change all that." To this it may be replied: Very good; it is, doubtless, highly desirable to make the Middle Class, as you say, " coherent in its expression, combined in effort, united in interest, and uniform in the objects it pursues." But how, if you once set about doing this, can you be so sure that you will not improve the Middle Classes out of existence? Have they not invariably set their faces against regimentation? Have they not indignantly repudiated the suggestion that human life could be safely communalised? Have they not insisted that equality was impossible? Have they not claimed that the rights of the individual were inviolable? If, as you allege, the Middle Class should be found to possess a monopoly of brains, it is not impossible that a way might be found to achieve the wished-for result. But the fact that it possesses a monopoly of wealth certainly tends to suggest that the problem may be less simple than it appears.

The same writer continues by telling us that he has devised a scheme by which all this may be accomplished, and that, when the auspicious moment arrives, he will divulge the details. Meanwhile, he thinks, the only policy that can be relied upon is a " secret organisation" which will develop alongside Capital and Labour. As the Middle Classes have never been lacking in secrecy, we may anticipate that this policy should prove irresistible. Whether it will prove effectual also only experience can show.

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN HISTORY,

THE Middle Class, contrary to the impression which prevails in the minds of many of its members, was made and not born. Moreover, it was self-made; that is to say, it came to pass principally owing to the shrewdness and sagacity of a few people who managed to anticipate and apply the discovery of Dr. Samuel Smiles, who lived some five hundred years later. Self-help rather than the will of heaven ordained that it should be. But how it contrived to achieve its pre-eminence we must endeavour to describe.

To many it must appear little short of blasphemous to attempt to account for the Middle Classes by any known or natural means. To the Middle-class mind, the Middle Class is a law unto itself. To approach it almost calls for metaphysical training. In our survey, however, at the risk of incurring the disappointment and displeasure of the reader, we shall eschew all metaphysical terminology. This will simplify our procedure. We shall not assume, for instance, that the Middle Class emerged from its primeval homogeneous state into a condition of heterogeneity owing to any unique aristocratic aspirations on the part of "evolving man." Nor shall we even hazard the conjecture that, in some incomprehensible fashion, "Nature's Gentleman" was spontaneously generated in some far remote age, and then managed, at colossal inconvenience and self-sacrifice, by a novel process of urbanity and discrimination, to win his way and establish himself and his species and to inspire everybody else with loathing and disgust for the "vulgar herd." To have proceeded in this

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

way would doubtless have delighted innumerable readers of this book, who would have been sure to exclaim, in an ecstasy of satisfaction, that that was exactly what they always knew to have been the case. As one cannot be sure whether such intuitive impressions are to be relied upon, we are compelled to proceed in a different way.

The advent of the Middle Class was delayed, like the millennium has been, for a considerable time; and it may be doubted whether, even when it finally arrived, it was as indispensable to society as it was to itself. Its history is exceedingly recent; so recent, indeed, that it is even yet non-existent in certain lands. Russia, even before the Bolsheviks set about exterminating the bourgeoisie, had but a very insignificant Middle Class numerically speaking; while Rumania is likely to be spared the Class War for some time on account of the fact that she has so far failed to produce any Middle Class worth speaking of. In like manner, our earliest traditions utterly fail to disclose all traces of a Middle Class.

There are reasons for this. In the "good old times" class barriers were there sure enough; but the feudal system, which was then in the ascendancy, only admitted of two distinct classes. These comprised the nobles and peasants respectively. Under this arrangement it was found quite possible to "carry on"; and though the plan may seem arbitrary, and even inconvenient, it had the advantage of simplicity. All unnecessary complications were avoided. Everybody had his place. What was more, he kept it. Thus the nobles had their estates, and accommodation was found for the peasants on the land; these, in order to justify their existence, being required to employ themselves helpfully in a manner that befitted their station. The plan seems to have answered admirably; for if there were dissatisfied persons in those days (as no doubt there

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN HISTORY.

were) we hear very little of their grievances. " Uppishness " was reduced to a minimum; and if anyone dared to dispute the existing arrangements it was relatively easy to dispose of him. Even the services of the police were unnecessary. Authority was authority in those days, and rebels were treated as rebels.

" Class " was a question of status: one was born to it, or it was conferred by the act of the Crown. The people realised the mightiness of rank, and nobody dreamed of expecting honours on the birthday of the Sovereign for mere services resembling those which entitle people to-day to receive such distinction. Rank in those days stood for a great many things. If one were a lord one had prestige, title, and lands. If one were not a lord, then one had to content oneself by being a labourer, an artisan, or a professional person. In those days even culture was humble. The lawyer, whose services were even then indispensable, did not presume to be the equal of his lord and master. He was content to attach himself to the household of his feudal chief. There he remained, and doubtless found plenty to keep him occupied. As for the Church, it had its own appropriate province, as Mr. R. H. Gretton tells us in his volume, " The English Middle Class " : " As individuals the priests and the monks might be either sprung from the nobility or the peasantry; but when they had acquired the *differentia* of a learned education they became, not a separate class, but portions of a corporate manorial lord."

The fact is that, until the fourteenth century, the Middle Class does not get a look in. Why it did not, and how it then contrived to do so, it now becomes our duty to discover.

As we have shown, the Middle Class was a backward class. But its backwardness was due principally to the

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

fact that economic and political conditions conspired against it. It had many foes. The nobles knew better than to encourage it. The peasants, too, had enough to do in serving their masters. Money was scarce, and what there was of it was rarely seen, as the Templars and Jews took good care to look after it. The feudal regime, however, could not last for ever. And it did not. Changes subsequently came about, and the nature of these changes we must endeavour to realise; otherwise we shall never be in a position to account for the existence of the third class.

Many, to be sure, must innocently imagine that the changes which resulted in the Middle Class must have been principally of a cultural kind, and that the exclusion of the Great Middle Class under the feudal system was owing to the consummate ignorance and barbarousness of that period. For this assumption, however, little evidence can be adduced. The mass of men in those days were, no doubt, relatively indifferent to cultural advantages. Had Lord Northcliffe, for instance, as a man born out of due time, lived at that epoch, his enterprises could scarcely have proved remunerative: the "Daily Mail" must simply have expired on the spot. What in reality retarded the advent of the Middle Class was not so much the slow conquest of the fruits of intellectual enlightenment, but rather the conditions which favoured a perpetuation of feudal economics. These, as we have seen, were simplicity itself. If the land problem was not settled in the sense in which we understand it, it was because no such problem existed. The landlords settled themselves, and the peasants performed the toil that was allotted to them. Money was not plentiful, and so long as men worked in the old, thorough-going way it was unnecessary. Services and skill were principally in demand, and these were exchanged mostly against material. Life was less complex

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN HISTORY.

in those days, and, provided that man's wants were **few**, he had little reason to complain. His wants were invariably few: his master saw to that. And consequently, though his standard of living, as measured by modern needs, must have been modest, he managed to "stick it." And for many years the feudal system loyally stuck to him.

But the time came when the feudal system began to show visible signs of collapsing. This was not apparent at once. It was gradual. Why the collapse came may be said to be due to the unexpected appearance of a new factor in the economic life of the English people. This factor is none other than the Middle Class. But at the time when it first appeared it was not known by that name. In point of fact, it was not known by any name. It was anonymous. From the first it shrank from publicity; but effects are always preceded by causes, and human nature is logical enough to infer the latter from the former. Things just happened, and it was assumed, in order to account for them, that somebody made them happen. In the most mysterious way wealth contrived to make its appearance in all sorts of unsuspected quarters, and people who had previously failed to attract notice owing to their comparatively modest fortunes, began to be suspected of having acquired access to hitherto undiscovered sources of wealth. How they made their wealth, nobody knew. The truth is, they did not make it: their wealth made them. Readers of that quaint book, "Piers Plowman," will call to mind sundry uncomplimentary references to "the rack-renters and buyers of advowsons," while Crowley also speaks of the "grete rych man" who, in spite of his anonymity, "buys lands." This is entirely in accordance with the historic tradition of the Middle Class. It started upon its career nameless, and its identification is possible

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

only on condition that we are prepared to grasp the economic principles of the post-feudal period.

The first Middle-class man, then, was a Capitalist. There had been Capitalists before his time. But the capitalism of the Middle-class man was of a particular kind. It alone was capable of giving rise to systematised, or rather chronic, capitalism. Before the Middle Class appeared upon the scene, Capital consisted mainly in land, goods, and services. Practically, indeed, no distinction was drawn between Labour and Capital. Labour was Capital. But when the Middle Class arrived a mysterious transformation ensued. This transformation was accomplished mainly through the instrumentality of money. Up to this time the use of money never appears to have occurred to any considerable number of people. The rich did not need it, and the poor knew too little about it to wish for more. But this happy state of things was destined to come to an end. The Middle Class, with an eye to the main chance, soon discovered that such lamentable indifference to money was the most deplorable mistake. Money might achieve almost anything; and if only it were judiciously employed in a "businesslike" way, it would speedily supersede the old practice of barter and exchange. The great thing to be done was to get as much money as possible.

Accordingly, a few well-to-do gentlemen got to work, and before very long contrived to introduce the most startling revolution in the economic life of their time. Their vocation, they decided, was "trade," and having set up as merchants, they soon managed to demonstrate to the bewildered onlookers the esoteric nature of their policy. This appeared simple enough, but was less easy than it seemed. The policy amounted to this: that what is mine cannot be yours, and what seems to belong to you in reality

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN HISTORY.

belongs to me. The application of this discovery, however, required money; and owing to the timely expulsion of the Jews and the downfall of the Templars considerable supplies of coin were available. These fell into the hands of the aforesaid gentlemen, who speedily realised their value for their purposes.

Money, being a "fluid resource," was soon seen to possess considerable advantages over mere "utilities" of the vulgar kind. You could not eat it, to be sure, nor was it plentiful enough to be used as the materials for building houses. A few people, however, who happened to be further-sighted than the rest, saw that it was possible by means of money to do even more than this with it. You could actually induce people to part with foodstuffs, wool, leather, and other merchandise for money, while they in turn could do the same to other people. Meanwhile, these operations had the curious effect of marvellously increasing the amount of money. The obvious thing to do, therefore, was to aim at buying. By buying things, however, you received only goods in exchange, and probably a supply far in excess of your needs. Hence you bought with the object of selling again.

The wool-growers and tanners soon came to see the advantage of this. Their belief in rich men was unbounded, for the man who had much money would buy wool and leather in large quantities from them, whereas, if they waited for the retailer to purchase their goods, though he might pay them a satisfactory price, invaluable time would be lost. Besides, in the meantime the merchants might have refused to buy wool or leather and invested their capital elsewhere, in which case all demand for their commodities would be at an end. Hence it was up to the wool-growers and tanners to supply the wholesale merchant with as much wool or leather as he could afford to buy. In this

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

way production was stimulated, and, what was even more to the point, coin was circulated. Raw materials and supplies increased with amazing rapidity. Trade went forward by leaps and bounds. And the mercantile system soon bid fair to become the most remarkable phenomenon in human history.

But the most substantial contribution to human progress that was thus conferred upon mankind was the conception of proprietorship. Hitherto the Crown and the nobility had claimed exclusive rights in this respect. Now, however, and by means of money, men began to realise that their property was their own—unless, indeed, they discovered that it belonged to somebody else who happened to be richer. The possessor of money was the privileged man. His business was to get other people to part with as much of their property for as little of his money as possible. And the fact that everybody wanted money made him the most important personage in the eyes of others. By means of money it soon became possible to do almost anything or anybody. Everyone, rich and poor alike, discovered that money was indispensable to his existence. He could not do without it.

Instead of money being the servant of man, it thus became his master. But this is not all that happened. Man's mastery by money ended in something more. And this was, that man became the slaves of the Rich. This was inevitable, and due as much to psychological as to financial causes. In refusing to resist the money standard, men were compelled to accept those who had made the new valuations. And these valuations, as we have seen, were the creation of the men who later became the Capitalists, or Middle Class. The Middle Class were, therefore, the men who laid the foundations of the Capitalist system, and they achieved this exclusively by the manipulation of money,

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN HISTORY.

Unless, therefore, we banish from our mind the preposterous delusion that the origin of the Middle Class consisted in Superior Intelligence, Ability, Culture, and Moral Capacity, we shall go wildly astray. To none of these endowments can we properly ascribe its ascendancy. From the first as to the last, money was its instrument, and the power that it wielded was economic. And this explains the Middle-class propensity for estimating mankind, for the most part, by what it has rather than by what it is. This has been instinctive on its part. Its Means became its Ends. Money in its eyes, instead of being the equivalent of services or skill, became the object for which skill and services were to be exploited. Wealth was to be acquired for its own sake: to be kept handy in case of need rather than distributed; and its concentration in the hands of the few was accepted as the normal state of affairs.

Naturally, this entailed a few drawbacks. To be sure, it established a standard of competency and comfort for those who were fortunate enough to be able to acquire money in any considerable quantity. But for those who failed to secure it, or were obliged to take what little they could get in helping to satisfy the commercial aspirations of their masters, the policy proved to be anything but satisfactory. It is indeed, frequently alleged that, with very trifling modifications, this arrangement is the only one that can safely be followed in any form of society with "civilised" pretensions. In point of fact, however, it is this very policy which many people have begun to see calls for reconsideration.

The so-called Class War, of which we are now in the midst, serves to demonstrate the mistake of taking things too much for granted. Capitalism may have been necessary, and the few who managed to make the most of such advantages as it had to offer may almost have the effect

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

of justifying it in our eyes. But its success in securing the interests of the few must not blind us to its failure in promoting the welfare of the many. Capitalism, whatever its advantages, has suffered from one fundamental defect: that it has proved incompatible with democracy. Men may have been forced to acquiesce in it, but they have never consented to it. In truth, it violates the principle of consent. It presupposes the instincts of the robber. And its supersession by a new system is conditional upon a reversal of policy. As it is, Capitalism is on the point of committing suicide; and it is doomed because it is assailed from within rather than because it has been assaulted from without. People who complain of the selfishness and greed of those who wish to overthrow Capitalism, have never seen Capitalism in its true colours. And they do not know human nature. Syndicalism and anarchism may not be the final state of man, but they are at least protests against something that would finally put an end to everything.

Let us be quite plain on this point: we must democratise our economics. And if we are to do this, let us realise that we must distinguish between what was inevitable the day before yesterday and what will be practicable to-morrow. The Middle-class mind no doubt served its purpose as well as its own interests. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it was distinctly in advance of its time. But its devices have outlasted their uses. Its aim, of course, was to demonstrate how money could be "made," and this without involving the superfluous effort of the possessor. That was undoubtedly a tremendous achievement, for by this means one man at least could enjoy comparative immunity from toil.

Originally, of course, the man who was fortunate enough to have a little money had to work, and with it he

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN HISTORY.

procured the materials that he needed for the purpose of his trade. If he was a shoemaker, for example, he invested in leather, and with that leather he made the shoes which he subsequently sold. These gave him a small profit, it is true, but this only repaid him for his trouble, enabled him to live, and to buy a further supply of leather for his trade. But the Middle-class Capitalist discovered a more economical plan. Why, he argued, should a man overburden himself with unnecessary responsibilities? Why should he bother to monopolise the capitalist, as well as the industrial, function of his craft? Why not specialise a little? Why not divide up? And why not solve the problem by inducing the shoemaker to sell his labour to him, instead of disposing of the shoes direct to the customer? Then the shoemaker need not trouble about the "business" at all. All the risk in buying the leather would be incurred by the middleman. The shoemaker would merely uphold the dignity of labour by working for his living and by hiring himself out to the prototype of Messrs. Freeman, Hardy, and Willis. What the small man had to say to these suggestions we do not know; what we do know is that he fell in with them, and that in the end he discovered that his fall was a descent into economic servitude.

The great idea of the Middle Class was that of showing Labour its real place in the social scheme. And as a preliminary it was found necessary to reduce the series of separate transactions whereby each worker or group of workers received, paid for, manufactured, and resold the materials of its trade. How much better it would be to subordinate these operations to a single transaction. Instead of letting each little man or group of men have his little bit, why not aim at a more efficient system which would give the big man a nice big slice? Thus a prosper-

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

ous gentleman, let us suppose, cherished aspirations to become a clothier. He no longer permitted the spinners, the weavers, and the retailers to waste their time in conducting their respective transactions separately. Instead, he conceived the brilliant notion of buying the wool from the wholesale merchant, delivering it to the spinners himself, and after paying them for their services, passing it on to the weavers, whom he also paid, at length receiving it back to sell himself. In this way the weavers and spinners soon discovered that, though it might require labour to weave and spin, money could be depended upon to "make money." So automatic was the process, indeed, that, as the clothier succeeded, he was able to buy not only the wool but the looms also; while by the time that the fifteenth century arrived, not only the looms, but the weavers themselves, were his property.

All the present disputes between Labour and Capital are traceable to circumstances which proceeded from these events. Capitalism, it is true, did not attain its full strength until long afterwards—in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in fact. But the foundations for the industrial revolution were securely laid in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is sometimes asserted, indeed, that all such disputes are based upon a misconception: that all denunciations of Capitalism are indiscriminating and unjust: that Capital was based at the first upon the native superiority of a class that was endowed with the ability to create, accept risks, and await returns, and that Labour consisted rather in the class that was unwilling to do this and unable to do anything but work. Our interpretation, however, will not admit of this construction. Evidently, if what we have said is true, Labour was first in the field. Then Capital came along, and realising the opportunities which awaited it, gradually acquired the superior position.

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN HISTORY.

To be sure, it did not fight for this position. There was no occasion for it to do so. It was too wealthy to fight. Diligence in business prevented it from doing so. Besides, the Middle Classes, though they have rarely been passivists, have never believed in unnecessary conflict. Compromise was better, and if any dispute could be adjusted amicably it was in every way desirable. Force should be resorted to only in the last extremity. Trade, they always reminded us, was peaceful, and if only good relations could be fostered between master and man, nothing need be feared. Certainly, for some time, the masters had little to fear. Their plan was to keep Labour well occupied, for the busier the workers' hands might be the less likelihood there would be of their getting into mischief by using their brains.

It will, of course, be objected that no mention has been made of the Guilds. The omission is, indeed, a most serious one. Labour, it is true, had its Guilds. But the fate of these was precisely similar to that of Labour itself. In the end the manoeuvres of the Capitalist resulted in the Guilds also getting into his hands. Originally, the Guilds had been the most democratic institutions imaginable. They knew no distinction between master and man, and the combination which they afforded between the craftsman and the trader enabled them to meet on a footing of genuine equality. But these arrangements were speedily perceived to be extremely inconvenient. The master-class insisted upon managing their own affairs, and as these could best be managed without the interference of working people they determined that the Guilds should be suppressed. The line had to be drawn somewhere, and the proper place, they decided, was where economic power ceased to exist. Accordingly, steps were taken to make the Guilds more exclusive, and they were shown that it

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

was in their interests to cater for the better-class worker. Thus, to take one example: the Guild Merchants of Newcastle excluded from their membership any person who had "blue nails"—such testifying to the disgraceful fact that he worked with his own hands at dyeing; or who hawked his wares in the public streets. But it must not be inferred from this that the Capitalists openly attacked the Guilds. The Guilds were far too valuable not to be encouraged, but they needed to be encouraged for the right purpose. This purpose was more apparent to the Middle Class than to anybody else. What they did was to discountenance the attempt on the part of those who, having nothing to lose and everything to gain in a material sense, might have used the Guilds as a stepping-stone to their advancement. Some of these people had actually managed to clamber up in this way to the Middle Class. In future this sort of thing must be stopped. So stopped it was; for, as Mr. Gretton tells us, the trade Guilds in the fifteenth century created a class of men virtually confined to the lower ranks of labour, prevented from becoming free of their craft, and constituting a "skilled but dismissible body."

Meanwhile the Middle Classes were far too occupied with their own concerns to be able to give attention to other affairs. Private matters and not public spirit were their aim. "Mind you own business" was one of their homely maxims. In truth, everything began at home with them; moreover, it frequently ended in the same locality. We do not find them, for instance, meddling in politics. Why should they? Legislation mattered little in their eyes. Unlike the modern aspirant to industrial control, they realised only too well that economic power must precede that in the parliamentary sphere; and though later on they found it advisable to have a finger in

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN HISTORY.

legislation, for the time being they kept their hand in their purse or in the pockets of others, where it was best concealed. If they were fined for illegal practices, what did it matter? Like honest men they paid up, and what more could be expected of them? Besides, being rich, they found many friends, and even their enemies, if only they made it worth their while, could be relied upon to leave them alone. Thus, for example, when it was proposed to undertake an assessment of movables and to impose a tax by means of Royal Commissioners, the towns simply offered a lump sum in commutation of the assessment, and thus prevented the Crown from obtaining in the returns a hold on the belongings of the well-to-do. The procedure is entirely typical. Throughout its career, from that time until to-day, the Middle Class appears to have conducted itself with the most consummate sagacity and worldly sense. Deeds, not words, were its ideal. And if it be objected that indifferent deeds may be no better than plausible speech, it must be allowed that some of its deeds are deserving of commendation. Even if its motives were not irreproachable, it still managed to perform actions which must be accounted meritorious. No doubt it was opportunist; unquestionably its very respect for law and order proceeded from a mind too destitute of originality to be capable of rebellion. For all that, the Middle Class performed certain services to the community which it ill-becomes us to overlook. One of these was the foundation of the Grammar Schools in England. In this matter the gain to the community was substantial. All education hitherto had been in the hands of the Church, and by establishing schools which were designed to be independent of ecclesiastical supervision the Middle Class succeeded in emancipating themselves from one of the most reactionary forces of the time. To jump to the con-

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

elusion, however, that this policy was pursued with a view to the deliverance of the Middle-class child from the bondage of theological superstition would be absurd. To the Middle Class religion has invariably been a secondary consideration, and the only reason that they have never distinguished themselves as rationalists is owing to the fact that their faculties have been engaged elsewhere. While, therefore, they have never as a class formally dissociated themselves from orthodoxy, whenever religion was calculated to interfere with their mundane interests they have avoided it. It was so in this case. Dreading lest the lords, the Crown, or the friars should come to be as wise as themselves, they sagaciously decided to have an education system of their own.

Another heirloom which the Middle Class bequeathed to posterity took the form of many of the cathedrals and churches. But these again, which were ostensibly erected to the glory of God, were doubtlessly designed to perpetuate the glory of the English merchant. As much may be inferred from the following fact. In those days, in spite of the growing love of wealth and the increasing power of obtaining it, rich men had few opportunities of indulging their taste for lavishness and display. Motor-cars and yachts were not then invented, and for the most part the average man of considerable means was content to restrict his personal expenditure within the narrowest limits. He lived simply and had few wants to gratify. By devoting his money therefore to the erection of churches and cathedrals he discovered a hobby which did two things; gratified his instinct for relieving himself of his superfluous wealth in a manner entirely in accordance with his sentiments, and at the same time justified his life in the eyes of those who might otherwise have been disposed to question the sincerity of his religious convictions.

THE MIDDLE CLASS IN HISTORY.

Whatever might be thought of him during his lifetime, at least nothing but what was good should be said of him after he was dead. And as the event of death was invested with due dignity and solemnity by the Church, the Middle-class mind very properly decided that it must look after their mortal remains. One such man was John Baret, who died in 1463. In his will he directed that money should be expended upon a stained-glass window with suitably inscribed verses of his own composition in memory of a friend; also that an image should be placed on one of the pillars of the church, close to where he was in the habit of sitting. From such bequests it is tolerably easy to infer the corresponding attitude of mind. Mr. Baret was evidently a man of means and leisure. Doubtless his home life was all that we could desire. In such matters as industry, frugality, and thoroughgoing common sense probably few surpassed him. But his piety was too much for him.

Whether John Baret got into heaven, we do not know; but if he did not, there is every reason for believing that if he was accounted an angel upon earth he was prepared to rest satisfied in his grave.

CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE CLASS LIFE AND IDEALS.

FROM what has been said, a fairly accurate notion can be formed of the process which has distinguished the development of the Middle Class. Its roots, as we have already seen, penetrate deep down in the economic soil of our historic past. And this fact may readily give rise to the impression that, on that account, any attempt to criticise it, or to tamper in any way with its growth, must have the inevitable result of imperilling the very foundations of society. The assumption, indeed, is not infrequently made; nor would it appear unreasonable. For since, in the main, the growth of the Middle Class has corresponded with the era of commercial and industrial expansion, and it is by the standard of trade that we are accustomed to estimate our prosperity, it might only be expected that the whole future of society must stand or fall according to the position and affluence of that class. As, however, opinions are not unanimous upon this subject, and especially in view of the alleged decline of the Middle Classes, we will proceed to extend our investigations to contemporary history.

Now, to tell the truth, Middle-class life has not escaped wholly the effects of the recent period of disturbance and unrest. So far, it has weathered the storm to a surprising degree; and many of the ills to which it has been exposed, it must be confessed, have been psychological rather than physical. At the same time, its habitual composure and serenity, which have been inseparable from its irreproachable taste and good breeding, have of

CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE-CLASS LIFE.

late been tried to the uttermost. What with the growing burdens of taxation, the increased cost of living, labour troubles, strikes, threats of strikes, and so forth, Middle-class life of late has been full of adversity. Many indeed must be convinced by this time that it is scarcely worth living at all. The Middle-class mind is sorely perturbed; its belief in the invariable and ordered sequence of natural events has been rudely shaken; and its conviction that progress must coincide with increased convenience and comfort to the deserving has been violently upset. Only its habitual restraint has prevented it from admitting this.

The Middle-class's universe has always been distinguished by the regularity of its mechanism. It resembled a complicated piece of clockwork. It was wound up at stated intervals; and the key, which they kept in their own pocket, or in the pocket of somebody else, where they could lay their hands on it, was of pure gold. To keep things going, all they had to do was to insert the key into the back of the clock and wind it up. It invariably went as it should. But somehow, something has gone wrong with the machinery. It will not work. And it has even been suggested that the key which is being applied is a misfit. Of course the Middle Class know better. The key cannot be wrong. It may be a little worn with use. But what is even more likely is that the works of the clock want putting in order. The clock must be reconstructed. It must be pulled to pieces, examined, and then put together again. But we must not do more than is necessary. It is a very good clock. It has lasted for centuries. And it will last for many centuries longer. A little oil perhaps, or a little regulating, is all that is wanted. The clock has not been keeping the right time. It has gained, the hands must be put back. Then it will keep time again. But in any case the key must be kept very carefully.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

The clockmaker, however, sadly shakes his head. He did not make the clock himself. But he understands it perfectly, he says. It has done good service in its time. But it must be scrapped. It will never go. Or if it goes, it will go at such a speed that nobody will be able to keep pace with it. So the Middle Classes are distressed beyond measure. What is to be done they do not know. They have no idea. Something they say must be done. The clock must be made to go somehow.

Meantime, the situation has become so serious as to have attracted the attention of the Press. And with the most timely intervention, public sympathy has been aroused on behalf of the downtrodden Middle Classes. The Middle Classes, we hear, are " martyrs." Sometimes they are alluded to as " squeezed consumers." While an Anglican bishop has even applied to them the pathetic, if inelegant, epithet: " patient beasts of burden." To all appearances their plight is a hopeless one. Nobody is able to help them, and they are unable to help themselves.

But what is wrong with the Middle Classes? That is the question. Here opinions are divided; but one opinion is that the Middle Class has not made the most of itself. You are unorganised, these people say. Follow the example of Labour, go in for " direct action." Rid yourself of your scruples. If the Government fails you, if Capital encroaches on your liberty, if Labour with its " drilled battalions " would elbow you out of your niche in the social scheme—put up a fight for it. Enter the Middle Class Union. Consolidate your forces. Realise the bond of affinity between yourself and your Middle-class brethren.

But the Middle Class has its misgivings. It is sick at heart. And though it thinks its enemies have found it out, it is not sure that it has found its friends. It is not

CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE-CLASS LIFE.

certain that it has any friends. It feels itself cut off from the rest of the world. It is disconsolate. It is told that it is the genuine democracy, and it is half persuaded to believe it; but then it has its doubts about democracy. It is reminded that the bane of its life has been its trustfulness : that it has been too ready to believe well of people. Thus even if a man belonged to the Capitalist Class the Middle Class were prepared to receive him in their drawing rooms, although all the time he was out to take them in. To-day it seems they are no less prepared to meet a plumber as their equal if only he will realise that the Middle Class and not the Labour Movement is his friend. All this has tended to have the effect of making them anxious to reconsider their position. Have they suffered the harmlessness of the dove to eclipse the wisdom of the serpent? Are they the prey of the upper and lower classes? Are the upper and nether millstones of society bent on grinding them to powder? Has it been discovered that they are the jam in the social sandwich of whose sweetness they are to be robbed?

Others, it must be confessed, have adopted a far less sympathetic and conciliatory attitude towards the Middle Class. Mr. Wyndham Lewis, for instance, is distinctly of the opinion that it should be heartily ashamed of itself. It deserves to suffer; for it is less sinned against than sinning. Its sins are many, and though they are not scarlet, even the colour-blind must know that they are not white. The Middle Class he regards as the veritable incarnation of snobbishness, stupidity, and selfishness. And if it goes under so much the better for it and everyone else.

Nothing, we agree, is easier than to lose patience with the Middle Class. But the very ease with which it is possible to do this proves it to be fatal. Even supposing

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

them to be all that Mr. Wyndham Lewis alleges, only one of two alternatives can be suggested: either the Middle Class must be exterminated root and branch, or it must be changed. Now the destruction of the Middle Class, if what Mr. Lewis says of it is true, may be regarded as a feat beyond our power. To attempt to destroy snobbishness, stupidity, and selfishness may seem a laudable enterprise ; but to defeat them successfully calls for exceptional qualifications. Upon the whole, then, to set about changing the Middle Class would be preferable. But the question is, how is this to be done?

Many Middle-class persons deny altogether both the practicability of such a change as well as the necessity for it. The Middle Classes, they tell us, have done very well, and if only other people will do as well by them, there is nothing to fear. Only give them a chance, make allowances for their failings, and above all, remember that they have been the backbone of society. If the social spine is weak, support it, but do not talk of tampering with the social anatomy. You simply cannot afford to do so.

Let us assume then that the Middle Class has a grievance: that it needs to be understood. This is perfectly true. The Middle Class has never been understood. We may even go further, and say that it has never understood itself. Such misunderstanding, however, has been due in part to its intense reluctance to face the essential truth about its existence. And that truth is, that its claim has rested upon a fallacy. What is this fallacy? It is this: that human life can be, must be, and in fact is, divided into compartments, and that these compartments, which keep people apart, nevertheless hold society together. This paradox we are told may be justified inasmuch as " human nature is what it is," and that whatever inequalities it

CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE-CLASS LIFE.

may appear to encourage, such inequalities are, in the main, inherent in mankind. Every "sensible man" realises, we are told, that men differ, and that these differences are best provided for by having a social system which, no matter how roughly, corresponds to them. If it be objected that occasionally the correspondence is not as exact or obvious as it might be, then the reply is made that the Middle Class is the real solution. It is ready, upon certain conditions, to receive any deserving man with open arms. If a man "rises" and makes money, the Middle Class is open to receive him, for it is always prepared to recognise merit and ambition. On the other hand, if men of exalted birth should have the misfortune to "come down in the world," they may console themselves with the reflection that they need never fall lower than the Middle Class; like the net beneath the slack-rope performer, its everlasting arms are always outstretched ready to receive them and break their fall.

To do it justice, the Middle Class, though it believes in "means" and "men of means," never cares very much for really self-made men. Its theory of ⁴⁴ independent means "moreover has never involved the assumption that the recipient shall have earned his income himself. And though it is inclined to estimate labour as well as most things, in terms of money, it has never dreamed of thinking of money in terms of labour. Wealth, for it, has been a problem apart from everything; and its acquisition has never presupposed the necessity for working for it on the part of its possessor. The Middle Class indeed has been far too shrewd to assume that Labour and Wealth stood in any truly causal connection.

But from this, we must not conclude that the Middle Class is an idle one. Far from it. Although it may have drawn the line at tinkers, ploughmen, miners and railway-

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

men, it has nevertheless admitted soldiers, sailors, authors, doctors, parsons, bankers, barristers, stock-brokers, actors, Cabinet Ministers, and wholesale tailors to its ranks. That is perfectly true. The fact, however, remains that all these gentlemen have been eligible for admission primarily, not in virtue of their vocation, but by reason of their income which ensured them the requisite leisure to adopt their respective callings. No man, for instance, who needs to make his fortune in a hurry dreams of becoming a writer or a barrister. The obvious inference, therefore, is, that in the pursuit of literature and the law one has means to begin with. This is not invariably the case; and occasionally even the Middle Classes are deceived in consequence. It sometimes even happens that professional people are deceived themselves. Seeing other Middle-class persons comparatively well-off, they leap to the conclusion that "Middle-class occupations" are remunerative. Hearing that bishops and prime ministers receive substantial salaries, they aspire to ordination and parliamentary fame, But unless such impecunious individuals subsequently inherit wealth, have money lent them or are otherwise assisted, they soon discover that it does not pay to belong to the Middle Class. And it certainly does not. Middle-class people are never supposed to want; and if they should want, their pride is supposed to keep them from disclosing the fact.

It is thus evident that Middle-class life may have its drawbacks. These drawbacks, however, are mostly typical only of Middle-class persons. In the main, Middle-class life offers a good many advantages—that is, when the conditions which make it really possible are available. By endowing a man with means it provides him with leisure; and providing him with leisure, it affords him ample opportunities for enjoying a good many

CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE-CLASS LIFE.

things that would lie beyond his reach if he were obliged to "earn his living." If a man is in receipt of "private means," he will be in a position to realise that life has far more value, interest, and variety than if he is compelled through sheer dread of starvation to work for every penny that he gets. To earn one's livelihood is often assumed to teach one the value of money. Whether it does this or not, it invariably leaves one in ignorance as to the value of life.

But though the Middle Class is relieved from many of the disadvantages that result from bread-winning, it is exposed to undeniable perils, the greatest of which is the fundamental fallacy implied by all class privilege. The man who has money which he calls his own and which comes to him irrespective of his personal exertion, may know the value of money: he may be quite sound as regards his notions of taste, comfort, sport, and even culture. For all that, he is not unlikely to underestimate or even lose sight of the value of a great many other equally important things. Money, he feels, and not unnaturally so, will secure him most of the things that he needs. He has only to pay for them, and straightway services, food, clothing, shelter, etc., are his. If only one can pay one's way, all is serene. What he is apt to forget is that his right to these, so long as others are compelled to work for his benefit in order that they may exist, is by no means the foregone conclusion that he imagines.

Now the Middle-class fallacy lies in this: that it has always taken this fact for granted. So long as the Masses produced, trade proceeded, and things were bought and sold, and money was available, all was well. Middle-class proprietary rights could never be disputed. Since they were content that others should be richer than

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

themselves, so they argued, others should not complain at being poorer: if they were content to have enough when others had more than enough, so others should put up with having less than enough. After all, it was only a question of degree, and it could not be helped. If things were not ideal, at any rate they tended to prevent worse things. Poverty might be bad for people, but idleness could not be better. At any rate, the only remedy was work: if the masses worked and the classes lived in a reasonable way, all would be for the best. Here and there, it was true, the Middle Class might be extravagant and luxurious, but that was the exception, and the charge only applied to certain Middle-class persons. It did not reflect upon the Middle Class. Taken as a whole, the Middle Class was the worthiest, the thriftiest, and the most sensible class alive. And with this admirable example before it, the nation should speedily set itself to work to achieve salvation.

The so-called attack upon the Middle Classes is due precisely to the fact that this attitude has been challenged. The terms of ownership for which it has stood have been absolute and unconditional. These have been questioned; and in spite of Middle-class logic, we must admit that the challenge is intelligible. Nay, more; it is justifiable. The Middle Classes are victims; their victimisation, however, is due to their own folly. In reality, the Middle Classes have never allowed their self-deception to go beyond a certain point. In a vague kind of way, they have realised that after all there was a connection between Labour and Capital. Labour, they affected to think, needed Capital; and if a man (any ordinary man) aspired to eat and live, he should pay for the privilege by working. This they knew because the Bible had said it, and because it would be impious to question a statement

CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE-CLASS LIFE.

advanced on Divine authority. Such a providential arrangement called for no proof, and they therefore deemed it superfluous to interrogate their personal experience. Had they done so, they would have seen that many who abstained from labour still contrived to eat and to drink into the bargain. Moreover, had they pursued their investigations, they would have made an additional discovery: that in reality the need of Labour for Capital was their own need also. The only question was how these two needs were to be supplied simultaneously.

Capital, however, in their eyes was a species of magic. Some declared that it was black magic: but the Middle Class preferred to see things in neutral tints. Anyhow, it performed miracles. One of the most surprising things about it was that, though it attracted Labour, Labour never became appreciably richer through contact with it. But whatever happened, and no matter how much Labour appeared to receive from the hands of Capital, Labour still remained very much as it was before. From time to time the Middle Class was manifestly distressed by rumours of industrial revolt and learned with no little dismay that an increasing share of the fruits of production was destined to go into the pockets of Labour. But nothing alarming occurred. Capital still survived; paid wages, distributed dividends, and maintained itself into the bargain.

In this way the capitalistic tradition prevailed for some time. But in the natural course of events, and with the advance of industrial organisation, changes began to approach. These were inevitably gradual; so gradual, in fact, that even the alarmists scarcely perceived them. Capital had always believed itself to be more than a match for Labour, and if any dispute had arisen between them, it was taken for granted that Labour would have

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

to give in: Capital would come out top. Strikes might not be illegal, but they were impracticable for the purposes of business, and what was bad for business was morally unsound. At length, however, a change was destined to take place. Capital, it was reluctantly admitted, was not omnipotent, and though it might be strong, it yet needed Labour. Unless, indeed, Labour could be induced to work, no capital would be forthcoming for anybody. This discovery, it must be admitted, Labour could claim the exclusive credit of making, and it lost no time in demonstrating the fact. The consequences were awkward. If it refused to put its shoulder to the wheel, the shopkeepers might whistle, but they had nothing to sell, and money, though it might be plentiful, remained useless. Labour, accordingly, realised its chance. Disputes as to wages, reduction of hours, problems of control and Nationalisation arose, and so forth; and though the employers remained obdurate, and the government developed an amazingly sensitive conscience which led it to insist that, in the interests of the community, Labour must perform its allotted task, the Middle Class realised that Authority was being undermined. What Labour chose to demand it stood to get. It might be generous and ask for less than they would ask in similar circumstances. It might listen to reason. It might even consent to be wooed by the voice of Lord Leverhulme and content itself with Co-partnership. But who could be sure?

But the thing that the Middle Class dreaded most was lest Labour should actually ask the inconvenient question why it should be expected to work. Nominally, it worked for its living; but in its heart of hearts the Middle Class knew that this was no answer. The Middle Class had never believed in working for its living. What was more,

it realised that Labour knew this. If, on the other hand, it had replied to Labour, " you are to work because, as a Middle-class person, my existence depends upon your labour and you must keep me," Middle-class susceptibilities would have been outraged. The bare idea of being dependent in any way went against the grain. Though in the eyes of extremists it might be labelled " parasitic/' the Middle Class realised that it could work as well as anybody; that it did work, and that it could help to support, not only itself, but society. All that it feared was that, in its willingness to proclaim itself useful, it should forfeit its reputation for being ornamental.

But the time has come when the Middle Class must be prepared to confront this emergency, and to meet the challenge of Labour. Labour is already asking why it should be expected to work. And if the Middle Classes can give no better reply to Labour than that work should be done from motives of enlightened self-interest, we may well be apprehensive of the consequences. For Labour's self-interest is clearly inconsistent with any arrangement which tolerates the present anomalies and mal-distribution of wealth. Self-interest, it is true, of the baser sort, may be compatible with the perpetuation of that form of industrialism which has permitted the many to toil for the sake of the leisured few. But no intelligent Middle-class person can contemplate the prospect of this enduring much longer.

Let us admit it: the old order is bankrupt. Labour is refusing to work under impossible conditions. This will inevitably mean that we must adapt ourselves to necessary changes, which will involve that our individualism will have to give place to a more communal conception. The Middle Classes cannot remain aloof from this, and if they attempt it they will only get left in the lurch. Mean-

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

time, some of them are beginning to ask where they are to come in; and, if their property is to be confiscated, how will it be possible for them to live? If Labour is to be allowed to claim everything, what will remain for anybody else?

But what the Middle Classes do not yet realise sufficiently is, that there is no reason why there should be "anybody else." In other words, they have failed to grasp that, as the class-monopoly of property is doomed, so also is class-labour. As for class-property, its administration, as we have seen, has resulted in a state of affairs which, while it has exalted the possessive functions of the few, has enslaved and degraded the dispossessed many. Moreover, not only has it fostered the abominable superstition that private ownership must be regarded as sacred, it has also blinded us to the truth that wealth is the perpetual creation of those who by brain and hand contribute to its production. The time is fast approaching when the ownership of railways, mines, factories, etc., will be regarded as an irrelevant or merely academic question, and when all natural and industrial resources will be viewed from the standpoint of public utility rather than private profit. Then, instead of tolerating their administration in the interest of their "owners," we shall have discovered their true value to consist in the exchange of goods and services rendered to the community. Perhaps before that time we may have introduced some measure of all-round compulsory labour, which would seem to be the only practicable course unless class-labour is to be perpetuated. This of course should so far reduce the hours of industrial labour as to enable a far larger proportion of the population to enter the ranks of the professions, arts, etc.

If only the Middle Class can be induced to accept this

principle and to act upon it, it may still be possible to save it from destruction, or at least as much of it as we could wish. It may be that the suggestion will be contemptuously disregarded: in that case it will be relegated to the limbo of oblivion. For whether they realise it or not, the Middle Classes will not be able to maintain themselves by "appearances" much longer. All hypocritical pretences must be flung aside. Their privileges must go. And if they are to survive it can be only on condition that they are prepared to justify their existence by proclaiming themselves the natural ally of Labour. But will they do this? The Middle Class to-day is half disillusioned. It has begun to see that Capital is not its friend, that it cannot be its friend, that it is soulless, that it is without body, parts or passions; and that the system that has been galvanised into activity under Capitalism, and which has favoured poverty, parasitism and plutocracy, is the most colossal imposture that the world has seen. And it has already begun to ask itself whether it has not a higher ideal than this? Has it not stood for something better than high rates of interest, lavishness, ostentation, and Fat Man philosophy? It is difficult to say. Its record is bad. But it half believes that it is better than it seems. And it well may be. If it has a soul, it is at least worthy of redemption. But its salvation is possible only on condition that it is prepared to break down the barriers that it has erected between itself and humanity, and that it will realise that its advantages, instead of being the monopoly of itself or of any class, must be the possession of all.

All this means that the Class War must be stopped; but if it is to end it must not end on Middle-class terms. It must end on human terms. The Middle Class must approach Labour. But then arises the question, Will Labour respond? Labour, it must be admitted, is jealous

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE MIDDLE CLASSES?

of her independence to-day, nor is this to be wondered at. Her battle, so far, has been fought single-handed; and if she is suspicious of her professed friends, she has every reason for being so. She needs no patronage, and overtures that are made to her with a view to exploit her must inevitably prove abhorrent to her. But the time has arrived when Labour will no longer be content to remain class-conscious, and will repudiate all attempts on the part of those who would seek to identify Labour with any section of the community. Already the absurd and arbitrary distinction between manual and brain workers is being abandoned. Work, it is coming to be seen, is not merely performed by the proletariat, but is the equivalent of the effort of all who, whether by hand or head or both, are engaged in productive service.

If this is so, evidently the Middle-class man who is not an idler is eligible to apply for admission into the labour world. If he is a worker, it is the duty of Labour to stand by him. But before the Middle Classes can be formally admitted to the ranks of Labour certain preliminary questions must be decided. First of all, the Middle-class claim to a monopoly of material advantages must be surrendered. All class privilege as such, of whatever kind, must be renounced. And though this need not entail for each individual member a life of privation and gratuitous discomfort, it must involve the unassailable conviction on the part of everyone that the advantages hitherto exclusive to the Middle Classes, shall be recognised as the legitimate possession of all.

Finally, lest we should be accused of leaving the bewildered reader in the clouds, let us come to facts. Lenin, it is reported, in spite of his proletarian sympathies, made one significant discovery. Though Soviet Russia was pledged to uphold the interests of the workers, he

CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE-CLASS LIFE.

found that he could not afford to exterminate every bourgeois, their scientific and technical attainments proving indispensable. It comes therefore to this, that unless the new basis of ability be accepted by the Middle Class it must go down. Its means will not save it. Only organised endeavour can come to its rescue, and such endeavour must be organised by the principle of union. If it is to survive, it is by the way of the Group or Guild that it must proceed. And its Guilda must enable it to affirm the only true principle of independence. In its creative work, and in the collaboration which is provided for its free and full expression, the Middle Class will not only have solved its own problems; it will have contributed also to the solution of the Labour problem itself.

