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“THE DESTINED CORNER-STONE OF THE NEW SOCIAL ORDER”:
THE EVOLUTION AND EFFECTS OF EDWARD BELLAMY’S UTOPIAN
VISION

An Undergraduate Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of Mount Holyoke College in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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INTRODUCTION

Growing up in Chicopee, Massachusetts, with parents who were active members of the Chicopee Historical Society, I came to know Edward Bellamy (1850-1898) as the man who had once lived in the house in which the Society held its monthly meetings. While I could name all the major companies that had ever operated in Chicopee by the time I was in sixth grade, it took me another year or two to find out that Bellamy had been a writer, and an internationally famous one at that. I later read Looking Backward and its sequel, Equality, but although I had found the books interesting I still knew little about their author.

I read Looking Backward a second time for my American Government class during sophomore year of high school. As my teacher distributed the books, a classmate looked at the author's name, raised his hand, and said, "Edward Bellamy. Is that like the school?" While I could understand why Bellamy's work was less enduring than that of some of his contemporaries', it occurred to me that he deserved better than to be unknown even to students who had attended the middle school that bore his name. Eventually, I decided, I would try to find out more about him.

"Eventually" turned out not to be as far off as I had expected. During the summer of 2007, the Edward Bellamy Memorial Association hired me to computerize their catalogue records. As I sorted through the Bellamy and

Bellamy-related papers, books, and memorabilia that had accumulated over the years, I realized that the question of how the writer had fallen into relative obscurity was less important than that of how he had become famous to begin with. His writing style was distinctive but not exceptional. His novels sold but were not literary masterpieces. Yet as late as the 1960s his family was still receiving correspondence from fans of Looking Backward who lived as far away as the Netherlands. How had a man who had spent most of his life in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, managed to write a novel that attracted followers from around the world?

In beginning my research, I focused on connecting Bellamy with his geographic location. What had happened in the manufacturing town and the communities that surrounded it that made him want to speak out against capitalism? Or had the growth of national labor movements been more influential in his work? To answer these questions I turned to Bellamy's personal notebooks, newspaper editorials, and early fiction. After reading through several old books, numerous rolls of microfilm, and pages upon pages of horrible handwriting that only became more illegible, I discovered that he had had an interest in not only local and national but even international happenings. There was also a continuity and conviction of thought that was present from Bellamy's earliest writings onward. This led to another set of questions: how had the writer worked these ideas into Looking Backward, and had the movement inspired by the novel's

success affected his ideas as much as the novel had affected people around the nation?

The intent of this project, then, is to examine more thoroughly how Looking Backward evolved from Bellamy's early writings and to place the novel, its sequel, and the Nationalist movement in historical context. By analyzing Bellamy's fiction, nonfiction, and personal writings, I have attempted to demonstrate that the more his ideas changed as he matured, the more they stayed the same.

CHAPTER 1
“A THRIVING VILLAGE OF NEW ENGLAND”:
EDWARD BELLAMY’S CHICOPEE

Writer and reformer Edward Bellamy was born to Maria Putnam and Rufus King Bellamy on March 26, 1850, in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, and was the third of four boys. Growing up, religion was the most important part of his family life; his father and maternal grandfather were both Baptist ministers, and his great-great grandfather, Joseph Bellamy, had been a student and friend of Jonathan Edwards, the well-known preacher of the First Great Awakening. Although he lost his faith in organized religion as a young adult because he could not understand why God would allow pain and misery to exist in the world, Bellamy still lived by the moral examples that his parents had set and was inspired by Christianity’s idea of a brotherhood of man—a concept which he incorporated into Looking Backward and other writings. His mother’s favorite child after the death of her oldest son, Edward also strove to live up to Maria Bellamy’s standards of maintaining a high purpose in life. Of his immediate family, Mrs. Bellamy influenced him the most; intelligent and reserved, both mother and son shared a love of books and ideas and a sense of duty to others.¹

¹ Sylvia Bowman, The Year 2000 (New York: Bookman Associates, 1958) 15-6, 24; Arthur E. Morgan, Edward Bellamy (New York: Columbia University Press, 1944) 14.

Despite his conservative upbringing, Bellamy's relatives also introduced him to more radical ideas, some of which found their way into his work. His father was a liberal-minded preacher who did not believe in eternal damnation, for example, and his maternal grandfather had believed that women should be well educated, an idea that Bellamy incorporated into both Looking Backward and its sequel. As a child, the writer's favorite relative had been the man known as Samuel (also Charles or Joseph) Bellamy—a New England pirate from the early eighteenth century who, according to legend, was a gifted public speaker and had held socialistic beliefs, not unlike the adult Edward. Utopian thought also ran in the family. Joseph Bellamy, the preacher, said in a sermon that “peace and plenty, universal love and harmony” could exist on Earth if everyone would follow Christ's teachings, and Charles Bellamy, Edward's younger brother, published a utopian novel called The Breton Mills about eight years before the publication of Looking Backward. While appearing traditional and conservative on the surface, Edward Bellamy, like his family, was unafraid to express less than traditional ideas.²

In addition to his family background, one cannot fully understand Bellamy and his work without knowing something of the community in which he lived. For him, Chicopee Falls was not just a section of the town—and later, city—of Chicopee, Massachusetts; it was where he grew up, raised a family, and wrote his articles, novels, and stories. Most of these activities took place in the wood frame

² Morgan, 9, 25, 217; Joseph Bellamy quoted in Morgan, 216; Bowman, 16.

Greek revival house at 91 Church Street, a few streets away from the brick house in which he was born. Over the course of his forty-eight years, he watched his community grow from a quiet village into a part of an industrialized city, a change which may have been reason enough for him to begin writing about and encouraging social and economic reform.³

Chicopee had been its own entity for less than two years when Bellamy was born. Originally the northern section of Springfield, it separated from its southern neighbor after residents chose not to support the town's decision to become a city. Springfield's town meeting favored applying for a city charter because they felt the current form of government had outlasted its usefulness to a growing population. Opponents of this plan, who lived mostly in the town's northern section, feared a dramatic increase in the annual budget and a decrease in benefits received; they proposed instead breaking up the territory into smaller towns to preserve the direct democracy of the town meeting. The opposition won, and on April 29, 1848, Chicopee was officially incorporated as a town.⁴

Approximately the same size as Springfield, Chicopee was ironically no more unified than the town from which it had separated. Collectively, the newly incorporated town had a population of 7,861, as well as its own newspapers, schools, churches, farms, and industry. Residents, however, still held closer

³ Bowman, 15.

⁴ Collins G. Burnham, "The City of Chicopee," New England Magazine, vol. 18 (Boston: Warren F. Kellogg, 1898) 367; Michael H. Frisch, Town into City: Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Meaning of Community, 1840-1880 (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972) 25-7.

allegiance to the areas they lived in than to the town as a whole, and some of the four original sections—Cabotville, Chicopee Falls, Chicopee Street, and Willimansett—developed faster than others. Fifty years and two more sections later, by 1898 Chicopee was slowly building “a stronger feeling of municipal unity.” Nevertheless, as one resident wrote: “Our letters come to four post-offices; our friends are confused by the various railway stations; our rogues have three lock-ups awaiting them.” Because of this phenomenon, the Chicopee that one man knew, even into the twentieth century, was likely to be very different from the Chicopee of a man who lived across town.⁵

The residents of Chicopee Falls seem to have been the least willing to recognize that they were inhabitants of a larger town. This continued dissociation may have been rooted in the 1848 movement for Chicopee’s incorporation; unlike the outspoken residents of Cabotville, the people in Chicopee Falls did not want to separate from Springfield except on the condition that the village known as Indian Orchard would also become part of the new town. Contrary to their wishes, Indian Orchard remained a part of Springfield, leaving the Falls seemingly separated against its will.⁶

A subtle but nonetheless poignant sign of its continuing unwillingness to be a part of a unified town is evident on maps of Chicopee through 1890. Until that year, when Chicopee became a city, there were numerous streets in Chicopee

⁵ Burnham, 367, 378; Josiah Gilbert Holland, History of Western Massachusetts, vol. 2 (Springfield, Massachusetts: Samuel Bowles and Company, 1855) 57.

⁶ Holland, 57.

Center (what used to be called Cabotville) that shared a name with a street in the Falls. Pre-1890, for example, one would have to specify which East, Springfield, or Center Street he or she was referring to. The dual existence of Front Street is one of the more interesting examples of name sharing; both streets ran along the curving Chicopee River but did not connect, and the Center's Front Street became Chicopee Road once it reached the Falls.

Besides having separate systems of street names, the two sections also had separate services. While the city shared a town government, each section had its own post office and separate fire departments with different chiefs. Therefore, when Bellamy referred to his place of residence as a village he was not being overly quaint. To him, his family, and his neighbors, Chicopee Falls was a small, distinct community that was only legally part of a larger whole. It was this sense of close community that Bellamy enjoyed growing up, and which he portrayed as being so important to his vision of an ideal society in Looking Backward.⁷

Another subject important to both Bellamy and the town he lived in was education. After its incorporation in 1848, Chicopee voted to raise \$13,645 in taxes for expenses in its first year, with \$7,400 of that amount budgeted for schools. The school system remained strong throughout the nineteenth century; children in every section had access to a school, and the town maintained two high schools and offered evening classes. Bellamy was a product of the Chicopee

⁷ The City of Springfield, Chicopee, Chicopee Falls, and West Springfield, Directory for 1881-82 (Springfield, Massachusetts: Springfield Printing Company: 1881) fold-out maps, 364, 404.

school system himself, although the formal education he and his brothers received was supplemented with reading assigned by their well-read mother. Having first-hand knowledge of the benefits of a good education, the writer advocated mandatory schooling for all children in both his early editorials and later work. “To educate some to the highest degree, and leave the mass wholly uncultivated,” Bellamy wrote in Looking Backward, “[...] made the gap between them almost like that between different natural species, which have no means of communication. What could be more inhuman than this consequence of a partial enjoyment of education!”

The schoolchildren of his day may not have agreed with this assertion, but as Chicopee’s mills expanded and class lines became more pronounced, Bellamy found the differences between the educated middle class and uneducated factory workers disconcerting. This sentiment comes across most clearly through his description of the dirty, poor, overworked children of the local mills as they celebrated Decoration Day in 1873. Ignorant “of almost everything useful” because they could not attend school, Bellamy said of their unfortunate condition that he “almost felt that it were better to be dead than to be so alive.”⁸

Chicopee established its first public library in 1853 when the Cabot Institute, a literary and social organization, gave to the town the nine hundred

⁸ Holland, 57; Clifton Johnson, Hampden County, 1636-1936, vol. 2 (New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1936) 658; Bowman, 17; Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward (1888; repr., New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996) 107; “Overworked Children in Our Mills,” Articles Written by Edward Bellamy in the Springfield Union, Paul Bellamy Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio (hereafter cited as Paul Bellamy Papers).

books in its possession. Chicopee also had social clubs and lyceums in which its residents could engage in debate. It was in such settings that Bellamy began publicly expressing his ideas; as early as age thirteen he presented a paper to a social club. He also gave at least two talks before the village lyceum during the late 1860s or early 1870s, the first on the role of education and the second on what he saw as the “social barbarism” of the time—namely, unequal distribution of wealth. Bellamy knew what it meant to be well-off because his mother’s sister, Harriet, who remained close to the Bellamy family, had married the wealthy William Satterlee Packer, but his refusal to accept any financial assistance from his aunt—or anyone else—demonstrated his commitment to the idea that one should only possess what one had earned.⁹

This problem of unequal distribution of wealth became a more prominent issue in Chicopee during Bellamy’s lifetime as the town became more industrialized. The son of a Baptist minister, Bellamy belonged to Chicopee’s middle class and resided in a predominantly middle class neighborhood, but the society of his adult life differed from when he was a child. The middle class had expanded during the 1860s and early 1870s when the need for more specialized stores and services increased along with the working class population, but while the large number of mill workers created a demand for more shops, they had a

⁹ Burnham, 377; Bowman, 19, 21; [First Lyceum Talk], MS Am 1181.4 (2), and [Second Lyceum Talk], MS Am 1181.4 (3), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University; Edward Bellamy, “How I Wrote ‘Looking Backward,’” Edward Bellamy Speaks Again! (Kansas City, Missouri: The Peerage Press, 1937) 218, 220; Morgan, 22.

negative effect as well. These men and women made up a high enough percentage of the merchants' total customers so as to cause a significant decrease in business if the mills slowed or stopped production. As members of the lower middle class slowly left Chicopee in search of opportunities elsewhere, the professionals, wealthy merchants, cotton mill agents, and managers of corporate enterprises of the upper middle class established themselves as leaders of the community.

Bellamy also saw the factory system and increases in immigration contribute to a change in class relations. While the first wave of immigrants were Irish, French-Canadians moved to the town beginning in the 1860s, and the fastest growing group of immigrants in the 1890s came from Poland. As in other mill towns, these men and women contributed to the growth of local industry but divided society at the same time; no longer having language, religion, or traditions in common with the Yankees who had built the community, the immigrant working classes distanced themselves from the merchants and manufacturers of the middle class and were less willing to accept them as community leaders. Immigrants from the same country also established their own churches, societies, and schools, limiting their interaction with Yankee families and businessmen. As society became more stratified, Bellamy was forced to watch the close-knit community atmosphere to which he was accustomed disappear.¹⁰

¹⁰ Vera Shlakman, Economic History of a Factory Town (1934-1935; repr., New York: Octagon Books, 1969) 172, 175-7, 181, 209-10; Arthur Lipow,

Manufacturing was economically important to the town as a whole; however it was a less integral part of life in some sections than in others. Of the original four sections, Cabotville and Chicopee Falls were the most industrialized, and while men from Boston owned and operated the cotton mills, the majority of companies were locally owned. With the exception of the cotton mills that existed in both locations, the industries that took root in Chicopee Falls differed from those that developed downstream, contributing to the unique identities of each village.

Manufacturing began in Cabotville, or Chicopee Center, around 1810 with the production of carding machines and spinning frames. The cotton industry came to the village in 1832 with the establishment of the Cabot Manufacturing Company, a company which the Boston-based Dwight Manufacturing Company took over and combined with the Perkins mills in 1841. Around mid-century, the average workday at the cotton mills lasted twelve hours, as did the workday at the well-known mills in Lowell, Massachusetts.

Another company that helped Chicopee become nationally known also grew from a small business into a flourishing manufacturing concern in Chicopee Center. Started in Chicopee Falls by Nathan Peabody Ames, the Ames Manufacturing Company moved downriver to Cabotville in 1834 where it became known for its metalwork. The company began producing swords when it obtained a government contract in 1831; the British, Spanish, French, and Turkish

Authoritarian Socialism in America: Edward Bellamy and the Nationalist Movement (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 145-6.

governments commissioned goods from them at various times in the company's history as well. Besides producing swords and cannons for the U.S. government during the Mexican and Civil Wars, Ames made presentation swords for army and navy officers and fraternal organizations. The company also produced various tools and forms of machinery, and bronze castings which included numerous monuments and the ornate bronze doors of the U.S. Capitol.¹¹

Besides the Dwight and Ames companies, by the 1880s the Center was home to the Blaisdell Cotton Waste Company, the Southworth Mill, and a bobbin factory, among others. It was home to notable people as well; Bellamy aside, the town's best known residents lived primarily in Chicopee Center and were not literary figures but lawyers and manufacturers. The Ames and Gaylord families lived within walking distance of the factories that bore their names. On Springfield Street, where the Gaylords lived, was the home of George M. Stearns, a well-known attorney, and just across the street from him lived another attorney, George Dexter Robinson. Chicopee residents came to know Robinson as the principal of one of the high schools; in the mid-1880s, Massachusetts elected him governor. While Bellamy would not have associated with the Robinsons, Gaylords, or Ameses who comprised Chicopee's upper class, he would have

¹¹ Orra L. Stone, History of Massachusetts Industries: Their Inception, Growth and Success, vol. I (Boston: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1930) 630-2; Laurence F. Gross, The Course of Industrial Decline: The Boott Cotton Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1835-1955 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press: 1993) 24; Burnham, 372-4.

known of them and may have drawn material for his editorials and fiction from their lives and business practices.¹²

Chicopee Center had the town's wealthiest residents, but Chicopee Falls saw the area's first industrial development; as early as the first decade of the nineteenth century the Belcher foundry was in operation. The cotton industry came to the area in 1823 with the incorporation of the Chicopee Manufacturing Company, and other businesses such as the paper mills followed. Manufacturing in Chicopee Falls was so prosperous by mid-century that in 1858 the Springfield Republican was able to report: "The Massachusetts Arms company are steadily increasing the number in their employ, B. B. Belcher is employing a larger number of hands than usual, and Whittemore, Belcher & Co. are in full and successful operation. Rents are scarce, with daily inquiries for tenements." By the 1880s, when Bellamy was writing Looking Backward, the village's industries were no less prosperous or diverse. Some of the better-known companies that existed at the time include the Lamb Knitting-machine Manufacturing Company, J. Stevens & Company, and the Belcher & Taylor Agricultural Tool Company, which had previously been known as Whittemore & Belcher. However, even

¹² Moses King, ed., King's Handbook of Springfield, Massachusetts (Springfield, Massachusetts: James D. Gill, 1884) 59; The City of Springfield, Chicopee, Chicopee Falls, and West Springfield, Directory for 1881-82, 367, 377, 390, 392; Burnham, 377.

though businesses were thriving, Bellamy recognized that his hometown was not immune to the labor problems associated with industrialization.¹³

After the success of Looking Backward, Bellamy spoke fondly of the Chicopee Falls of his childhood: “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 everyone who was willing to work was sure of a fair living.” At age eighteen, however, he modified his views because of a trip abroad. In 1868, Bellamy traveled to Germany to be with his cousin, William Packer, at his mother’s request. In addition to studying the German language and touring the cathedrals, he witnessed the effects of the industrial revolution in Europe and was shocked at the poverty and poor conditions that members of the lower class endured. His education abroad most likely included lessons in German socialism as well, although he denied this later in life. Chicopee Falls in the 1860s was nowhere near as industrialized as some cities in Europe, but Bellamy nevertheless returned home to realize: “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 trip had shown him that poverty was a very real part of life in an industrialized society, and the development of more distinct social classes in Chicopee, as well as the increasing

¹³ Shlakman, 34, 48, 64; “Local Brevities,” Springfield Weekly Republican, April 10, 1858; King, 59.

number of factories, must have inspired a concern that America—and his town—would soon see the same problems.¹⁴

Just as he saw the development of the negative effects of industrialization in his hometown, readers can see images of Chicopee Falls in his writing, both fiction and nonfiction. Although he does not seem to have ever mentioned the company by name, the cotton mills to which Edward Bellamy referred in his editorials and upon which he drew inspiration for his unpublished novel, Eliot Carson, were almost certainly those of the Chicopee Manufacturing Company. The mills were located down the hill from his house, as were the tenements, and it would have been almost impossible for the writer not to have had some contact with the mill workers or familiarity with their place of employment. One editorial, published in the Springfield Union in 1874, suggests that Bellamy was in fact quite familiar with the living conditions of the workers down the street; titled “More Elbow-Room,” the piece describes how tenements were built so close together that not even a cart could fit through the alleys between them, in addition to being cramped on the inside.¹⁵

Along with poor housing, Chicopee’s mill workers endured poor working conditions and low wages and occasionally went on strike. The first strike in western Massachusetts took place in 1836 when female employees of Cabotville’s cotton mills protested an increase in the cost of board that was unaccompanied by

¹⁴ Bowman, 21-2; Edward Bellamy, “How I Wrote Looking Backward,” Edward Bellamy Speaks Again!, 217-8.

¹⁵ “More Elbow-Room,” Springfield Daily Union, March 5, 1874.

any increase in pay. It did not last long and was generally seen as a display of unladylike behavior on the part of otherwise respectable Yankee girls, but this strike was not the last. In 1843 the Chicopee Falls mill girls attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to organize a strike against the management of the Chicopee Manufacturing Company because of decreasing wages and increasing machinery speeds.

The first major local strike in the cotton industry during Bellamy's lifetime was part of a larger movement against cotton mills across New England, a direct result of the financial crisis of 1857. Earnings varied by a person's occupation and the demand for cotton goods, but the median earnings of female operatives at the Chicopee mills went from \$2.90 in January of 1856 to \$1.24 toward the end of 1857. Having lost thousands of dollars and wanting to reduce expenses (especially wages), the mills cut back on operations in 1858. At Chicopee's Dwight mills, the management increased the length of the workday to 11.75 hours and imposed a reduction in wages of twenty percent. Six hundred of the sixteen hundred employees stopped working, arguing that at the new wage rate they would not make one dollar per week above the cost of board. Despite the walkout, which went on for two weeks, wages did not increase until May of 1859. This strike differed from previous movements in that its participants were much less peaceful; Chicopee's board of selectmen had to appoint sixteen special constables to maintain order. Also unlike previous strikes, the majority of

workers who turned out were Irish rather than Yankee, marking a change in the composition of the town's unskilled workforce.¹⁶

Workers' activities at the Chicopee mills paralleled those at Lowell in some ways. In 1836, for example, Lowell workers also went on strike in protest of reduced wages and an increase in the amount they were expected to contribute towards their board. Further, the percentage of immigrant workers at the mills grew between 1836 and 1860, with foreign-born workers increasingly replacing those who were native-born. Only one major strike occurred during the 1850s (in 1859), and, as in the Chicopee strike that had taken place one year earlier, the participants were mostly immigrants. However, unlike the earlier strike, a very small percentage of workers turned out—a mere three hundred to five hundred women, or six percent of workers from four of the town's mills. By contrast, about 37.5 percent of employees turned out at the Dwight mills alone.¹⁷

While the occasional strike involving a small group of workers occurred at Chicopee's cotton mills during the 1860s, these movements were for the most part isolated and ineffective. A reduction of wages at the Chicopee Manufacturing Company in 1867 led a small group of spinners to strike in 1867, as did a reduction of wages at Dwight Manufacturing Company in 1868. In neither case were the spinners' efforts effective; the Chicopee Manufacturing Company replaced the striking workers, and the men at the Dwight mills returned to work

¹⁶ Shlakman, 62, 121-2, 143-6, 250; "The Cotton Manufacture 'Strike' at Chicopee," Springfield Weekly Republican, April 10, 1858.

¹⁷ Harriet H. Robinson, Loom and Spindle, or Life Among the Early Mill Girls, revised ed. (Kailua, Hawaii: Press Pacifica, 1976) 51; Gross, 24, 26.

while their demands were left unmet. However, one strike held in the 1860s seems to have garnered some results. In 1868, some spinners at the Chicopee Manufacturing Company struck again, this time accompanied by mule-tenders, spool-tenders, and dress-tenders. After several weeks of refusing to work or let others do their jobs for them, many of the strikers returned to work and received higher pay.

The strikes of the next decade were reactions to wage cuts necessitated by the financial crisis of the 1870s. Those that occurred in 1874 and 1875 demonstrated not only Chicopee workers' desire for better wages, but also the development of a sense of connection with the national labor movement. The strike at the Dwight mills in April of 1874 was the first strike in the town involving a union; the mule spinners formed a local organization that received contributions from mule spinners in other towns. Some of these supporters were from Lowell, where a similar strike took place the next year. Demonstrations continued for a month, but the men were no more successful than previous strikers had been. Unable to gain the support of fellow mill workers, they also lost the support of the merchants who depended on their business. The Springfield Union of April 21 confirms this, commenting: "The universal expression among business men now is that they had better accept the offers of

the company. If they do not, they will entirely lose the respect and sympathy of the better class of the community.”¹⁸

By 1890, when the factory town became an industrial city, factory workers across Chicopee had made several attempts to organize for better working conditions. These efforts, however, were generally unsuccessful; their wages had increased slightly since 1860, but at no point had they made any political impact either locally or on a higher level. Except for the organization formed by the mule spinners, no labor unions existed in the town. Two chapters of the Knights of Labor existed from 1884 to 1887, but they functioned primarily as social organizations. Similarly, very little labor organization occurred in Lowell. Unable to attain significantly higher wages and forced to spend their savings during periods of economic downturn, the workers of Chicopee were generally unable to move into a higher socioeconomic class.¹⁹

By the time Bellamy died in 1898, Chicopee was home to a population of around 18,000 and a still-growing working class. Large corporations owned and operated the factories, and investments came from outside the city. However, although Chicopee—and more specifically, Chicopee Falls and Chicopee Center—had come to epitomize the industrial and capitalist systems that Bellamy found so distasteful, one change did occur during the last years of the writer’s life of which he presumably did approve; two years after becoming a city, Chicopee

¹⁸ Shlakman, 186-8; Gross, 89; “The Negotiations Between the Strikers and the Overseers—Fair Offers of the Company—The Strikers Divided,” Springfield Daily Union, April 21, 1874.

¹⁹ Shlakman, 193-4; Gross, xv.

began to experiment with the provision of municipally owned utilities. In 1892, the state legislature approved the city's decision to purchase and expand the property and supply of the existing water companies. The venture succeeded, and four years later the city did the same with the local power companies, resulting in the creation of the Chicopee Electric Light Department.²⁰

From a certain perspective, Bellamy was very much like his hometown. While the Chicopee of the nineteenth century was an example of a typical factory town in many ways, it was also very much its own place, as the unique identities of its various sections and their residents demonstrate. Similarly, while the author's style was not much different from that of other writers of his time, he still managed to capture the imaginations of readers around the world and make a lasting impression. Most important, however, is that as his town—and his neighborhood—became more industrialized, the anti-capitalist themes in Bellamy's writing grew less subtle; the allegory of The Duke of Stockbridge became the long lecture that was Equality. Given his assertion that he was “a homebody,” which implies that he felt a strong connection to his place of residence, this could not have been much of a coincidence.²¹

²⁰ Burnham, 367, 369, 378; Shlakman, 206.

²¹ Edward Bellamy to his parents, April 4, 1878, MS Am 1181 (47), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

CHAPTER 2
“SOBER IMAGINATIONS, GOODISH SENTIMENTS”:
BELLAMY’S EARLY FICTION

Editorials aside, Edward Bellamy was most outspoken in Looking Backward and the related publications that followed. However, although his philosophies did not attract national attention until 1888, Bellamy’s developing character and opinions emerged in some of his earlier and lesser-known fiction, his stories reflecting themes and ideas recorded in his journals and journalistic writing. As biographer Sylvia Bowman wrote, “a study of Bellamy’s early or minor fiction does show his preoccupation with ideas which were to be developed in one way or another in his famous Utopian novels or which were to be important in the formation of the objectives which his ideal society was to attain,” supporting the idea that the writer’s earlier works were not all insignificant pieces of typical Victorian literature but rather a means of preparing for the writing of his most respected work.¹

Bellamy began his career as a writer of fiction while he was still on the staff of the Springfield Union, penning and publishing several short stories. These stories, which he produced from 1875 to late 1889, appeared in an assortment of national publications, from Scribner’s Monthly Magazine (later Century Magazine) to Appleton’s Journal, Lippincott’s, and Atlantic Monthly. In

¹ Bowman, 45.

all, he is known to have published twenty-three stories, fifteen of which were posthumously anthologized. Twenty-five percent of Bellamy's stories appeared in 1877, and all but seven were published between 1875 and 1880, making the 1870s his most productive decade.²

While some were light romances, others of Bellamy's short stories served as experiments in using fiction to convey more serious points. This desire to provoke thought with his creative writing left little room for well-rounded characters or complex plots, but his philosophical musings come across clearly. A few of his more philosophical stories focused on relationships, such as his "A Love Story Reversed" (1888), in which a woman plays the more dominant role in a relationship, and "A Positive Romance" (1889), in which Bellamy explores the concept of self-sacrifice through the ideas of sociologist Auguste Comte. "The Cold Snap" (1875), his first published story, takes the idea of sacrifice in a different direction, detailing the ways in which a family comes together to help each other through a bout of frigid weather.³

In "Extra-Hazardous" (1877) and "Jane Hicks" (1879), Bellamy engages issues of class and ownership. The story of how a stranger saves the life of a woman who was bitten by a snake, "Extra-Hazardous" addresses the idea that some level of guilt is associated with holding property. The stranger in question refuses any reward from Miss Livingston for saving her life, and in the end

² Nancy Snell Griffith, Edward Bellamy: A Bibliography (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1986) 11-4.

³ Bowman, 48-9.

readers discover that he is a lawyer and not the tramp he appears to be. He explains his lifestyle: “I am tired of this grab etiquette at the table of life. I do not ask for a great portion, but what I do have I want to be able to eat with a good conscience, with assurance that it is mine. To that end I would gladly concede that everything of right belongs to others, so that my claim to at least what they freely give me might be clear.” This idea of taking only what one has earned or is freely given plays a large role later on in Looking Backward, in which people are dependent only on themselves for their incomes.⁴

“Jane Hicks” is similar to “Extra-Hazardous” in that the title character saves a woman’s baby from drowning, but, to everyone’s bewilderment, refuses any reward, even though her family is very poor. Jane explains that physical possessions do not mean as much as the reward of knowing one has helped another in some way, saying, “I’d rather have fine feelings than fine dresses.” Bellamy also used “Jane Hicks” to comment specifically on the working and living conditions of factory workers. In the opening paragraphs, he contrasts the comfortable lives of a factory town’s wealthier citizens with the lives of the more unfortunate, bringing the wealthy and generous Mrs. Hall to the tenement home of Dan Lynch, a factory worker with a recently broken leg and a large family to support. In describing the Hicks family, Bellamy refers to them as members of “the class of poor white trash which is by no means confined to the Southern

⁴ Edward Bellamy, “Extra-Hazardous,” Revisiting the Legacy of Edward Bellamy (1850-1898) American Author and Social Reformer, ed. Toby Whiddicombe and Herman S. Preiser (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002) 52-3; Bellamy, Looking Backward, 44-6.

states, whence that excellent descriptive comes,” and talks about Jane’s dress as being indicative of “extreme poverty” and “in keeping with the shabby and dilapidated appearance” of her home. With this story, Bellamy brings attention to the situations of many people whom his audience may have preferred to overlook, and with the character of Jane—a compassionate, intelligent, hardworking young woman—he reminds readers that the poor and factory workers are, in fact, people, too.⁵

Aspects of some stories bear a striking resemblance to events in Bellamy’s own life. Because only a fraction of Bellamy’s personal papers survive (much of what was not sold as scrap paper was destroyed by a fire at the home of biographer Mason Green), it is impossible to know whether Bellamy wrote much about his personal life in his journals. Therefore, many of the stories with autobiographical characteristics help readers see the author’s personal side, the details suggesting what made the biggest impressions on Bellamy or what was most important to him.⁶

Most evident in his early stories is how taken he must have been with Emma Sanderson, his future wife and the ward of his parents. In “A Superfluity of Naughtiness” (1877) the protagonist marries his parents’ ward, and in “That Letter” (1880) a man marries a woman ten years his junior (Emma was eleven years younger). Many stories, including “A Providence,” “Hooking

⁵ Edward Bellamy, “Jane Hicks,” Revisiting the Legacy of Edward Bellamy (1850-1898) American Author and Social Reformer, 98-9, 105.

⁶ Morgan, 71.

Watermelons,” and “Jane Hicks,” contain descriptions of a town not unlike Bellamy’s Chicopee Falls, to which he had a particular attachment, and “A Tale of the South Pacific” (1880) is set in the Hawaiian Islands, a place Bellamy had visited with his brother, Frederick, in 1878.⁷

Some of Bellamy’s longer fiction, like Six to One: A Nantucket Idyl, is somewhat autobiographical as well. Published anonymously in 1878, Six to One is a short, predictable romance: an overworked man from New York City spends several months on Nantucket in the company of his cousin and her five female companions, falls in love with one of the young women, and becomes engaged to her after they survive a near-death experience. More of a novella in length, the tale is not remarkable for its storyline or style, but rather the insight into its author that it contains.

The book’s first chapter is a possible expression of the frustrations its author felt about his own career. Like Bellamy, Frank Edgerton left his position as a newspaper editor for health reasons. Through a conversation between Edgerton and his friend, a doctor, Bellamy described the misery that he and his protagonist shared:

Somehow my mind will not quit fretting over my work when I leave the office, as it used to. I find it next to impossible to relapse into a passive state, however tired I am, and I feel dreadfully tired all the while. But more excitement instead of less, is the only thing that rests me, and I know that must be wrong. [...] I cudgel my brains in vain, and have pretty much made up my mind that I’ve overrated myself and been overrated, and that I ought to resign my position.

⁷ Bowman, 41, 60.

Published shortly after Bellamy left the Springfield Union, Six to One most likely expresses the stress and anxiety he experienced while working at the local paper. Because Edgerton worked in New York City, however, Bellamy may also have been alluding to his first few months as a journalist, when he wrote for the New York Evening Post.⁸

Bellamy wrote a second semi-autobiographical novel, but this one was never published. Probably begun in the 1870s, the story focuses on a man named Eliot Carson and his quest to remove himself from society in avoidance of the professions and practices he despises. Biographically, Carson and Bellamy were very similar—both briefly attended college but never graduated, and both practiced law before becoming disgusted with the profession and abandoning it for more ethical pursuits. When planning his sequel to Looking Backward, Bellamy considered reviving Eliot Carson since many of its themes were consistent with those of his utopian novel, but he eventually rejected this idea, choosing instead to write a continuation of the story he had begun in Looking Backward.⁹

Bellamy's first work of more serious, longer fiction appeared as a serial in a western Massachusetts newspaper called the Berkshire Courier. Running in 1879, The Duke of Stockbridge told the story of Perez Hamlin, a veteran of the

⁸ Six to One: A Nantucket Idyl (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1878) 6-7; Bowman, 39, 150.

⁹ Notebook #3, MS Am 1181.5 (3) and Eliot Carson Notebook, MS Am 1181.5 (11), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University; Bowman, 42, 139; Morgan, 119.

Revolutionary War who led a group of men in protest of and armed rebellion against taxes, debt collectors, and the local courts.¹⁰ The editors of the Great Barrington-based newspaper intended the serial to reflect their view that the poor, uneducated, and unemployed had been, and still were, a threat to society. However, where they cast present-day strikers and rebellious Shaysites in a negative light, Bellamy's was a more forgiving—and historically accurate—position. An allegory comparing contemporary economic troubles with those of the 1780s, The Duke of Stockbridge gave readers a lesson in revised history while suggesting that current systems also needed reform—an idea that also became the theme of Looking Backward eight years later.

In introducing the first installment of The Duke of Stockbridge, the Courier explained how the economic downturn and accompanying strikes of the 1870s paralleled the economic and political struggles that followed the American Revolution. “The same confusion in the currency, the same destruction of commerce, the same paralysis of industry, are now, as then, the result of a war,” the editors wrote, implying that the current state of affairs was just as disorderly as that of about ninety years before. They went on:

[W]e have evidence enough that debt, poverty, and non-employment have lost none of their maddening influence upon the hearts and brains of working-men. The parallel extends even to the very schemes and theories by which the agitations of today,

¹⁰ The Duke of Stockbridge did not exist in book form until 1900, when Bellamy's cousin, Francis Bellamy, author of the Pledge of Allegiance, published a much-edited version of the story. Joseph Schiffman published the original text in book form in 1962 (Joseph Schiffman, introduction, The Duke of Stockbridge by Edward Bellamy (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1962) xxxi).

encourage and delude their followers, most of which are merely the revamped ideas of Shays and his lieutenants.

But so convincing was Bellamy's novel that the anti-Shaysite editors of the Berkshire Courier changed their thinking:

Mr. Bellamy has seen more clearly than many historians and not a few political economists where to place the blame for the cruel misery that he depicts. [...] While never permitting us to sympathize with the crude notions, dissolute ways and bloody designs of the armed mob, he does not let us lose sight of the facts that these are but the outgrowths of an ignorance and despairing poverty that the more favored families, and even the christian [sic] church, had taken absolutely no pains to alleviate.¹¹

One event that had probably inspired the editors to initially draw a more negative parallel between the 1870s and Shays's Rebellion took place in 1877. During the summer of that year, the Great Railroad Strike stopped rail traffic on major railroad lines throughout the Midwest and the Northeast and demonstrated the railroad workers' opposition to another round of wage cuts. Unlike earlier strikes in other industries, such as mining and textile manufacturing, this one had a farther-reaching impact, showing that discontent among workers was not isolated but more widespread. Violence broke out in cities such as Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and Chicago as strikers and other demonstrators engaged in physical confrontations with law enforcement. Most notably, this marked the first time that federal troops were used to end a strike; as was the case during Shays's

¹¹ Schiffman, The Duke of Stockbridge, viii-ix; Berkshire Courier quoted in Schiffman, The Duke of Stockbridge, viii, xi.

Rebellion, the government was unwilling to listen to the protesters' grievances and attempted to end their movements by force.¹²

The events collectively referred to as Shays's Rebellion occurred primarily from fall of 1786 through February of 1787. While Daniel Shays is most commonly characterized as its leader, the rebellion consisted of a series of protests and armed conflicts that occurred throughout Massachusetts and were led by several men. Berkshire, Hampshire, and Worcester counties saw the most support for rebellious activities, although the amount of support varied by town, and the rebellion attracted national attention. Little of this attention was favorable; in 1788, George Richards Minot wrote a history of the events which he described as the result of "the lenity of government" rather than any weakness in its structure. Echoing the commonly held opinion of the time (and of the century following), Minot labeled all the participants as criminals, refusing to view the men's actions as justifiable.¹³

Daniel Shays, a farmer and veteran of the American Revolution from Pelham, Massachusetts, became involved in the movement that later bore his name after his town called a county-wide meeting to discuss what could be done

¹² Nell Irvin Painter, Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919 (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987) 15-7.

¹³ Leonard L. Richards, Shays's Rebellion: The American Revolution's Final Battle (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002) 55-6; George Richards Minot, The History of the Insurrections in Massachusetts in the Year Seventeen Hundred and Eighty Six (repr., Boston: James W. Burditt and Company, 1810) 189-90. In 1876, Hampshire county included the county that exists today as well as the towns that make up what are now Franklin and Hampden counties. (Richards, 55).

about the way the state government was ignoring the political and economic grievances of towns throughout Massachusetts. Turning down the town's request that he lead men from Pelham in converging with other disgruntled citizens at the courthouse in Northampton, he eventually agreed to command the largest regiment of rebels. His military experience and the size of his regiment led authorities to assume he was in charge of the entire rebellion.

The rebels—under Shays and others—closed courthouses in Berkshire, Hampshire, and Worcester counties, engaged in skirmishes with the state militiamen commanded by Benjamin Lincoln, and, most famously, failed in their attempt to capture the federal arsenal in Springfield. Efforts on the part of the insurgents eventually died down, and in an attempt to regain control state officials offered them restored citizenship in exchange for an oath of allegiance and a small fine. Nine leaders were specifically excluded from these pardons, but Shays was eventually pardoned anyway.

Contrary to Minot's belief, the drama of Shays's Rebellion highlighted the weaknesses of the federal government under the Articles of Confederation. Although he had taken an oath of retirement, the rebellion caused George Washington to believe that the Articles needed changing, and he agreed to lead the convention held in Philadelphia during the summer of 1787. While debating the role of the new government, delegates also debated the role Americans should play in it. Many political leaders saw what had happened in Massachusetts as proof that the common man could not be trusted to hold public office, and some,

including James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, were unsure that all men could be trusted with the right to vote. Elbridge Gerry, a delegate from Massachusetts, declared that Shays's Rebellion was the result of "excess democracy," leading delegates to carefully think about who should be considered eligible for public office, and by what means these men should be elected.

The rebellion also convinced Constitutional Convention attendees of the need to create a standing army. Following the Revolution, state militias were established as a means of defending against insurrections and as a substitute for a standing army. However, this method of defense had clearly not worked effectively enough in putting down the rebellion across Massachusetts. While some delegates believed that nationalizing state militias would be enough of a change, provisions for a national army under the command of the president were also written into the Constitution.¹⁴

Of all the rebellion's events, best known are Shays's efforts in Hampshire County, particularly the failed attempt to capture the federal arsenal in Springfield. Writing for a Berkshire county newspaper, however, Bellamy instead described the events specific to that area and drew on local legend and town archives for inspiration. He based all characters and occurrences on real people and events; the grossest use of poetic license is the relationship between Perez Hamlin and Desire Edwards—a married man's romance with a woman who did not exist. Nor did Bellamy fictitiously describe eighteenth-century

¹⁴ Richards, 8-9, 26-7, 35, 36, 39, 42, 131, 133-5.

Massachusetts. According to Joseph Schiffman in his introduction to the restored text, the novel “portrays the unique character of colonial-revolutionary Western Massachusetts in its distinctive vernacular speech, mores, folkways, proverbial lore, and superstitious beliefs,” while “Bellamy’s understanding of the churchly nature of that society provides rare insight into its traditions of Sabbath-breaking, its use of meetin-seed¹⁵ and theological puns.”¹⁶

Bellamy begins the novel in 1777, describing the scene in Stockbridge as the town’s Minutemen prepare to go off to battle. He effectively contrasts Stockbridge during the period of wartime with the setting in 1786—there is a close community atmosphere in 1777 that does not exist nine years later, which also seems to parallel the loss of community brought on by the spread of capitalism. As families gather to wish their loved ones goodbye, the town’s businessmen assure them that they will not have to worry about their financial security with their breadwinners gone:

Squire Edwards tells Elnathan, who with Mrs. Hamlin has come down to the green, that he needn’t fret about the mortgage on his house, and Deacon Nash tells him that he’ll see his crops are saved, and George Fennell, who, with his wife and daughter stands

¹⁵ Bellamy explained the tradition of meetin seed: “[I]t was doubtless the discovery of some secret virtue, some occult theological reaction, if I may so express myself, in the seeds of the humble caraway, which led to the undeviating rule of furnishing all the members of every family, from children to the grey heads, with a small quantity to be chewed in the mouth and mingled with the saliva during attendance on the stated ordinances of the Gospel. Whatever may be thought of this theory, the fact will not be called in question that in the main, the relaxation of religious doctrine and Sabbath observance in New England, has proceeded side by side with the decline in the use of meetin seed” (Bellamy, The Duke of Stockbridge, 143-4).

¹⁶ Schiffman, The Duke of Stockbridge, ix, xix, xxiii-xxiv.

by, is assured by the Squire, that they shall have what they want from the store. There is not a plough-boy among the minute men who is not honored today with a cordial word or two, or at least a smile, from the magnates who never before have recognized his existence.

Nearly a decade later, as people throughout the area experience financial hardship, these same men are much less forgiving; finally returning home after serving in the Continental Army, Perez Hamlin finds his brother, Reuben, in jail because he was unable to repay a debt to Deacon Nash. As Reuben Hamlin explains: “I tried to start a farm arter the war, and got in debt to Deacon for seed and stock, and there wasn’t no crop, and the hard times come. I couldn’t pay, and the Deacon sued, and so I lost the farm and had to come here.”

Up until the time Bellamy was writing, historians had focused less on the rebels’ motivations and more on their seemingly shifty natures. Even those who acknowledged that larger economic problems had influenced the rebellion still described the rebels’ actions as part of “their wicked scheme.” Intending to explain to his readers that the rebellion had been a necessary response to hard times and an ineffectual post-Revolutionary government, Bellamy wrote about the people’s grievances, conveying them through a conversation among men in a tavern. In this scene, frustrated Stockbridge residents discuss how jobs are scarce, the wealthy spend more on imports than American-made goods, paper currency is worthless, taxes are higher than when imposed by the British, and the government in Boston cares little about the western part of the state. They theorize that conditions would improve if the courts were stopped because from 1774 to 1780,

between the stopping of the King's courts and the ratification of the state constitution, life was much better in spite (or because) of the war.¹⁷

Historically speaking, these were very real concerns for the people of Stockbridge, and all of western Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 had effectively consolidated power in the Boston area. What happened at town meetings was less important than the decisions of the governor and state senate, decisions over which the residents of rural Massachusetts had little influence either in actuality or on paper. The state's debt was high, currency was valueless, and state taxes were indeed higher than during colonial times. As in Bellamy's story, these conditions led men under the command of Perez Hamlin to close the court at Great Barrington, raid Stockbridge and make prisoners of its gentlemen, and lose a battle with the militia as they tried to leave the state.¹⁸

In describing his characters and their actions, Bellamy was careful to neither vilify nor romanticize them unnecessarily. While none of the characters are terribly well developed as people, the author did not classify them into predetermined categories, instead leaving readers to make their own judgments. Where history up to this point had cast all the rebels as criminals and the well-off businessmen, government officials, and those in various legal professions as victims, Bellamy portrayed the former as men desperate to improve their quality of life during economic downturn and the latter as obstacles to this goal. In

¹⁷ R.M. Devens, Our First Century (Springfield, Massachusetts: C.A. Nichols and Company, 1877) 126, 129; Bellamy, The Duke of Stockbridge, 10, 15-21, 36.

¹⁸ Richards, 35-6, 74, 88.

keeping with his more objective approach, however, he also described the drunken, disorderly conduct of some of the insurgents and their disrespect for those who opposed their efforts, including women.¹⁹

Bellamy did not discuss any of the consequences of the rebellion in The Duke of Stockbridge, ending it instead with the image of Captain Hamlin lying dead in the forest. By doing so, he made his story more poignant; concluding with a scene that appeals to one's emotions, the writer leaves his audience to feel that some injustice has been committed. Nineteenth-century historian John Bach McMaster, whom labor leader Eugene Debs later praised for addressing America's social and economic history, described the events this way: "It was not indeed till the twenty-sixth of February that a considerable force came over the line from New York. Captain Hamlin commanded them, marched them to Stockbridge, plundered it, and went off with a number of the first characters in the town as prisoners." McMaster's view is more balanced than that of earlier historians, such as Minot, but Bellamy's view is more liberal still. Although he does not fully justify the rebels' actions, he demonstrates that they were acting out of frustration and necessity rather than malice and with this final scene implies that there is something noble in fighting or dying for what one believes in.²⁰

¹⁹ Bellamy, The Duke of Stockbridge, 126, 170-2.

²⁰ J. Robert Constantine, ed., Letters of Eugene V. Debs, vol. 3 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990) 534; John Bach McMaster, A History of the People of the United States, from the Revolution to the Civil War, vol. 1 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1883) 327.

Over the next two decades (the last two of his life), Bellamy published only one other piece of historical fiction, a short story titled “An Echo of Antietam.” It echoes the idea that “it is a good thing to be able to die heartily in any cause,” a sentiment he wrote in a notebook, probably on the occasion of Decoration Day in 1872, and which he implied in the final paragraphs of The Duke of Stockbridge. Appearing within the pages of Century Magazine in 1889, the year following the publication of Looking Backward, the story revisited the novel’s themes of the value of patriotism and sacrifice for the good of one’s country. For Bellamy, patriotism meant something more than love of country; it was also a love of the men and women who populated that country. Although “An Echo of Antietam” takes place during time of war, the writer hoped that his audience would be willing to translate the patriotic values of wartime with which they were familiar into a movement for social improvement during a time of peace.²¹

September 17, 1862, was the bloodiest single day in American history. Fought just outside the town of Sharpsburg, Maryland, the battle of Antietam, as it was known in the North, resulted in over 5,500 total deaths. Bellamy most likely chose this battle as the backdrop for his story because of its unfortunate distinction; one of the greatest examples of what it means to sacrifice for a common cause, in the midst of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Civil War much

²¹ Notebook #1, MS Am 1181.5 (1), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University; Griffith, 12; “The Old Patriotism and the New,” New Nation, July 8, 1893, 333.

of his audience would have had some memory of or association with the momentous battle or its participants. The history books of the 1870s and 1880s also helped to keep memories of the battle alive by describing in detail the horrifying sights and smells of the field after the battle, “The Shock and ‘Glory’ of War on a Colossal Scale.” With the availability of such dramatic descriptions and the public’s memory of relatively recent events, Bellamy’s tale was almost certain to elicit an emotional response from its readers.²²

The desired response was an understanding of the importance of sacrifice for the common good. Unlike Looking Backward and The Duke of Stockbridge, “An Echo of Antietam” does not address the flaws of a system in need of reform; instead, it creates nostalgia for a time when people were united by a shared cause. While the beginning of the story centers on Lieutenant Philip King’s patriotism in leaving his beloved and his law practice in order to defend his country, the end, centered around his funeral, dwells on the sacrifices made on the home front. After sharing the words of a funerary sermon that leaves its auditors feeling “vaguely troubled because they still lived,” the author concludes his story with a description of how Grace, Philip’s fiancée, realizes the good that her sacrifice of her happiness has done. Through this historical story, as he does with The Duke of Stockbridge, “Jane Hicks,” and others, Bellamy conveys the importance of

²² James M. McPherson, Crossroads of Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 3, 129; Devens, 798, 803.

selflessness in a time of need, an idea that he hoped would take root in the time of corruption and greed in which he lived.²³

Given his personal interests, it is not surprising that Bellamy wrote historical fiction. Rather, it is surprising that he did not write more of it. As a boy he was very interested in history, writing essays with such titles as “Philip and Alexander” and “The Marshalls of Napoleon,” and the list of required reading that he composed for his young son included works such as McMaster’s History of the People of the United States from the Revolution to the Civil War and John Richard Green’s Short History of the English People. However, while historical fiction could be educational on multiple levels, as proven by The Duke of Stockbridge, Bellamy seemed to be more interested in experimenting with various other conceptions of time and, in his utopian novels, gave up on conventions of fiction almost entirely.²⁴

Bellamy’s early fascination with time and memory is evident in stories such as “The Blindman’s World” and “The Old Folks’ Party” (1876), as well as in the third and fourth of his published novels, Doctor Heidenhoff’s Process (1880) and Miss Ludington’s Sister (1884). The former, which was serialized in the Springfield Union about two years before appearing in book form, is the story of a man who watches the woman he loves sink into depression and eventually

²³ Edward Bellamy, “An Echo of Antietam,” The Blindman’s World and Other Stories (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1898) 33, 56-8.

²⁴ Bowman, 19; Morgan, 146.

commit suicide because she is haunted by a past sin. The latter is a novel focusing on the existence—or non-existence—of a person’s past selves.²⁵

Fellow utopian novelist William Dean Howells mentioned Doctor Heidenhoff’s Process in his introduction to The Blindman’s World, the posthumously published collection of fifteen of Bellamy’s short stories, calling it an impressive piece of realism. The novel sparked Howells’s interest in Bellamy’s work, helping to guarantee him a place among the best-known writers of the nineteenth century; besides writing enthusiastic reviews of his fiction, Howells introduced Bellamy’s novels to publishers in the United States and Britain. The first commercially available novel bearing Bellamy’s name, Doctor Heidenhoff’s Process explores issues of guilt, and whether one should have to carry the burdens of past sins forever. The author later revived the idea that one should not necessarily have to be responsible for the past in Equality, a novel in which he explains that it makes no more sense to inherit wealth than it does to inherit debt.²⁶

Before the publication of Looking Backward and the creation of the Nationalist movement, Bellamy seems to have been most interested in the idea of past selves. He touched upon this idea in several short stories and devoted an entire novel to it—Miss Ludington’s Sister. This novel takes the ideas from Doctor Heidenhoff’s Process a step further, considering not only people’s

²⁵ Morgan, 62.

²⁶ William Dean Howells, introduction, The Blindman’s World, v-vi; Bowman, 43-4; Edward Bellamy, Equality (1897; repr., New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1924) 110.

relationships with events of the past but also whether one is the same person throughout one's entire life. In positing that people cannot truly make up for their sins because the person who shows remorse cannot be the same as the one who sinned, Bellamy suggests that guilt is unnecessary. The short stories "Lost" (1877) and "The Old Folk's Party" also suggest that people have past selves. In "Lost" a man returns to Germany to find the lover he left there, only to discover she is married with children and bears no resemblance to the girl he knew; in "The Old Folk's Party," a group of friends dress up as their future selves and speak of their youthful personalities in the third person. As he did with the idea of disassociation from past sins, Bellamy incorporated the concept of different selves into Looking Backward; as the novel progresses, Julian West reevaluates his life in the nineteenth century and wonders how he could have lived as he did without concern for the rights and well beings of the members of the working class.²⁷

"The Blindman's World," published in 1886, deals with issues of time and memory, but from a different perspective. Set on Mars, it describes a man's encounter with a species of alien that has no memory, only foresight. Through the Martians, Bellamy argues that dwelling in the past makes little sense. As one Martian says:

Your eyes are placed in front of you. You would deem it an odd mistake if they were placed behind. That would appear to you an arrangement calculated to defeat their purpose. Does it not seem equally rational that the mental vision should range forward, as it

²⁷ Bowman, 54-7.

does with us, illuminating the path one is to take, rather than backward, as with you, revealing only the course you have already trodden, and therefore have no more concern with?

The story serves as a sort of preview of the themes of Looking Backward, in which the author urges readers to forget the harmful and inefficient ways of the past and encourage reform.²⁸

Over the years, Bellamy filled his journals with jottings on potential characters and plots. Although many of these never became completed works, those stories and novels that he did publish outline the progress he made toward creating his vision of the utopian society of the future. A man who summed up his occupation as “writing books, contributing to magazines, newspaper work, general scribbling,” Bellamy remained proud of his earlier work; in a letter to the Houghton Mifflin Company in 1889, Bellamy wrote: “Why would it not be a desirable and probably a profitable thing to revive Miss Ludington’s Sister and try to push it a little? It is a good book and with the vogue of Looking Backward to help it.” While Looking Backward may be the only piece of Bellamy’s fiction that is still remembered, his earlier novels and short stories are equally useful in understanding the development of the utopia that continues to fascinate.²⁹

²⁸ Edward Bellamy, “The Blindman’s World,” The Blindman’s World, 13.

²⁹ Biographical information as written by Bellamy, August 24, 1887, MS Am 1181 (47), and letter to the Houghton Mifflin Company, July 8, 1889, MS Am 1181 (58), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

CHAPTER 3
“A TRUE REPUBLIC”:
THE EVOLUTION OF LOOKING BACKWARD

Writing was not Edward Bellamy’s first career choice, but rather his third. While it was also the only occupation at which he spent any considerable amount of time, he drew on his knowledge of the army and the law—career choices one and two—to lend details and supporting evidence to the ideas presented in his published works, including Looking Backward. Just as his early interests provided material for his writing, so did his early writing serve as a means of developing his political and economic views; reading through his notebooks and newspaper editorials, one can clearly see evidence of the principles of social and economic equality on which Bellamy based his utopian novel.

Looking Backward tells the story of a man named Julian West who falls asleep in 1887 and wakes up in the vastly different world of the year 2000, only to discover that capitalism has been replaced by a cooperative system and class distinctions no longer exist. His twentieth-century host, Dr. Leete, as well as Leete’s wife and daughter, explain to him the numerous improvements that have been made to society over the last one hundred years. As he wrote in one of several essays on the subject of his most famous work, Bellamy saw the novel as more than another “fanciful romance.” To him, it was an effective way to present

the problems of—and replacements for—the social structure and economic system of the Gilded Age:

Looking Backward [...] is intended, in all seriousness, as a forecast, in accordance with the principles of evolution, of the next stage in the industrial and social development of humanity, especially in this country; and no part of it is believed by the author to be better supported by the indications of probability than the implied prediction that the dawn of the new era is already near at hand, and that the full day will swiftly follow.

While some of his earlier fiction (particularly “Jane Hicks” and The Duke of Stockbridge) also addressed contemporary economic and political issues, Looking Backward served as an opportunity to discuss such topics more thoroughly, along with their social implications.¹

The novel’s first chapter introduces readers to the Boston—and, by extension, the America—of 1887. Building a house for himself and his fiancée, Julian West is frustrated by the constant delays in construction caused by various strikes. Strikes had been so common since the Panic of 1873, West explains, that “it had come to be the exceptional thing to see any class of laborers pursue their avocation steadily for more than a few months at a time.” Resulting from the wage cuts and layoffs that accompanied general economic hardship, strikes regularly occurred during the depressions that lasted from 1873 to 1879 and 1882 to 1885. In 1886, the year in which Bellamy began writing Looking Backward, several major strikes took place, including the peaceful nationwide general strike that began on May 1 and was marred by the Haymarket bombing in Chicago.

¹ Edward Bellamy, “The Rate of the World’s Progress,” reprinted in Bellamy, Looking Backward, 163.

Regarding labor organizations, the more non-confrontational Knights of Labor received so many applications for membership in early 1886 that they initiated a screening process to make sure applicants were sincerely interested; membership of the American Federation of Labor was strong as well. Bellamy was certainly aware of the increasing interest in organizing labor, and he wrote his novel partly as a response to the unrest that was spreading across the country.²

Bellamy does not immediately condemn capitalism, but slowly enumerates the problems with the system in order to convince readers along with the protagonist that his society of the future is much more appealing. West is a member of the wealthier class, as is evidenced by the “ancient wooden mansion” which he has inherited and his ability to pay for the construction of a large new house. He has never had to work a day in his life, although a majority of his contemporaries were not so fortunate; already unpleasant working conditions were made worse during the 1880s as capital investment increased, factories became larger and more common, and machinery became more heavily used. Cities sprang up around the country of which a permanent class of industrial workers was an integral part. Also unfortunately for common laborers, toward the end of the nineteenth century the poverty level rose with inflation while wages remained unchanged. In 1890, three years after the first chapters of the novel is set, the wealthiest one percent of Americans controlled fifty-one percent of the wealth, and the upper classes, or twelve percent of families, cumulatively

² Bellamy, Looking Backward, 7; Painter, xxviii, 44, 46-7; Bellamy, “How I Wrote ‘Looking Backward,’” Edward Bellamy Speaks Again!, 223.

controlled eighty-six percent. By comparison, the poorest class, or forty-four percent of the population, owned roughly one percent of the wealth, and the middle and lower classes held only fourteen percent combined.³

To overcome the problems created by greed and irresponsibility, Bellamy proposed nationalizing all industries, essentially creating a “Great Trust,” the “final monopoly in which all previous and lesser monopolies were swallowed up, a monopoly in the profits and economies of which all citizens shared.” His plan (after which the Nationalist movement of the 1890s was named) calls for the reorganization of the workforce into an industrial army of which the president of the United States is head. State governments are abolished, Congress meets once every five years and has little business to conduct, and there is no standing army (of a military nature). Most importantly, under this system every worker earns the same amount of credit—there is no longer currency—for working to their full potential, regardless of their chosen profession. A degree of materialism still exists, but individuals are unable to spend beyond their credit limit.⁴

Bellamy characterized the social and economic changes as being more of an “evolution” than a “revolution.” “All that society had to do,” he explained through Dr. Leete, “was to recognize and cooperate with that evolution, when its tendency had become unmistakable.” Although never explained in any detail, the entire process was the next logical step in economic development; just as small,

³ Bellamy, Looking Backward, 6-7, 10; Painter, xix, xx, xxxiv; Charles H. Page, Class and American Sociology: From Ward to Ross (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 4.

⁴ Bellamy, Looking Backward, 27, 43, 45, 91, 101.

independent businesses had grown into monopolies, so had the monopolies been consolidated into one, a “single syndicate representing the people, to be conducted in the common interest for the common profit.” To Bellamy, this was the obvious solution, and, although it could not reasonably be applied on a global scale in so short a time span, he believed that the goal of nationalization could be achieved in the United States within the next century.⁵

The plan for a society driven by a commitment to working for the common good was radical but not new. The Grange movement, begun in the 1860s and unable to survive the depression of the 1870s, was centered around agriculture, advocated cooperation in labor and trade, and supported the establishment of friendly relationships between producers and consumers. While the local Granges organized across the country primarily served as social groups, they also were politically active, helping elect some legislators to office and getting laws passed in Midwestern states that regulated railroads and grain elevators.⁶

A less agricultural organization, the Sovereigns of Industry, held similar beliefs of the value of cooperation and expressed opinions that were very much like Bellamy’s own. Determined to “prevent the waste of labor, and to put an end to the exaction of profit without any correspondent creation of value or use, and to swallow up the bitter rivalries and animosities of labor and capital and trade in an

⁵ Bellamy, Looking Backward, 24, 27; Edward Bellamy, “Why I Wrote ‘Looking Backward,’” Edward Bellamy Speaks Again!, 203.

⁶ Devens, 939; Painter, 60.

inclusive harmonizing of them all,” the group formed in 1874 as the industrial equivalent of the Grange movement. Although the Sovereigns of Industry had disbanded by the time Bellamy wrote Looking Backward (the organization was dissolved in 1879), they may still have inspired the writer because of a local connection—the group was organized in Springfield, Massachusetts. This city was also where they operated their largest cooperative store at which goods were provided to members at cost, so the author may have had some knowledge of the principles behind its operation. A later article by Bellamy suggests that this is the case; in 1893, he proposed that unemployed workers be organized to support one another by creating a cooperative store.⁷

Regarding social changes, Bellamy devoted a chapter to his ideas for a revised educational system. While secondary schools had begun providing vocation-oriented courses and college enrollment was increasing in the late nineteenth century, the author found the system lacking in many respects and advocated several changes, including compulsory education until the age of twenty-one. As Dr. Leete informs his guest: “To educate some to the highest degree, and leave the mass wholly uncultivated, as you did, made the gap between them almost like that between different natural species, which have no means of communication.” Not only would people be social equals under his plan, but

⁷ Devens, 943-4; Edward W. Bemis, “Cooperation in New England,” *Publications of the American Economic Association* 1, no. 5 (November 1886): 30, 33, 47, in *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2485565> (accessed April 18, 2009); “Should the State of Municipality Provide Work for Its Unemployed?” *New Nation*, November 11, 1893, 493-4.

because of the existence of equal opportunities and the absence of nineteenth-century stressors, cases of insanity and suicide would almost never occur. The new system encourages physical health as well; until he or she graduates from school, each student is required to take physical education classes. To Bellamy, improving education was the easiest way to initiate social change. As he wrote in an article following Looking Backward's publication, "surely it is most rational to begin the reform of society with that portion of it which is most plastic, that is, with the children."⁸

Bellamy also envisioned changes on the domestic level. Under his plan, servants are no longer required because families live in houses that are no larger than needed; labor-saving devices have been invented, and laundry is done in public facilities. All cooking occurs in public kitchens, and every ward has its own "dining-house" where meals can be taken. By reducing the amount of housework to what is absolutely necessary, the inhabitants of the twentieth century—particularly women—have fewer responsibilities and more time for recreation.⁹

The book also discusses the progress of women's rights. Whereas women of the nineteenth century were occupied with housework and child rearing, women of the twentieth century are allowed employment, even after marriage, and receive the same amount of credit for their work as men. Because women are

⁸ Lipow, 146; Bellamy, Looking Backward, 105-9; Edward Bellamy, "Our Prospective Sovereigns," Edward Bellamy Speaks Again!, 170.

⁹ Bellamy, Looking Backward, 57, 71.

no longer dependent upon men for support, marriages are based on love rather than convenience. Despite these proposals of equality, however, Bellamy's vision is not entirely that of a feminist; as Dr. Leete explains, "The men of this day so well appreciate that they owe to the beauty and grace of women the chief zest of their lives and their main incentive to effort, that they permit them to work at all only because it is fully understood that a certain regular requirement of labor, of a sort adapted to their powers, is well for body and mind [...]." Although women are allowed to choose their careers and earn credit, they work fewer hours, have more frequent vacations, and are organized in a labor force similar to but separate from that of the men.¹⁰

Bellamy's discussion of national government is interesting because of his view of the structure of political parties and his comments on anarchism. He advocates national unity through his description of how the national party of the future—"The most patriotic of all possible parties"—was formed, explaining through Dr. Leete that it developed to achieve the goals of labor unions by political means. Regarding anarchists, the doctor explains their role this way: "No historical authority nowadays doubts that they were paid by the great monopolies to wave the red flag and talk about burning, sacking, and blowing people up, in order, by alarming the timid, to head off any real reforms." While Bellamy himself may not have seriously believed this assertion—according to a note, at least, his narrator does not—his remarks imply that the misdeeds of

¹⁰ Bellamy, Looking Backward, 124-5, 127-8.

monopolies should be obvious to his contemporaries, if only they would take the time to look for them.¹¹

Although the American public did not become familiar with the ideas contained in Looking Backward until 1888, to Bellamy they were not new; in effect, the novel was an amalgamation of thoughts the author had been putting on paper as early as the 1860s. Reflecting on a talk he had presented to the Chicopee Falls Village Lyceum in 1871 or 1872, he commented that “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.” As Bellamy suggested, by reading this and other writings—both published and not—the origins of his utopia become apparent, and readers can readily see the development of his ideas over time.

The particular talk to which Bellamy referred in the above quotation is preserved in a manuscript titled “The Barbarism of Society.” In it, the writer compares the social structure established by industrialism to a form of slavery and asks that “none labor beyond measure that others may be idle, that there be no more masters and no more slaves among men.” Written (and, presumably, spoken) with a dramatic flourish, the piece also comments on the cruelties of the social system that forced children of poor parents to leave school and become laborers at an early age. The topic of child labor was especially important to Bellamy, and he addressed it multiple times in later writings. This paper, along

¹¹ Bellamy, Looking Backward, 122-3.

with his first lyceum talk (the subject of which was education), demonstrates that the author was socially conscious even as a young man not much older than twenty.¹²

Like the children he wrote about, Bellamy was unable to fulfill his childhood dreams. However, the experiences that he did have provided the writer with material for creating his society of the future. For example, young Edward developed a fascination with the military and, at age ten, wrote a list of the characteristics he felt one needed in order to be a good soldier. In 1867 he applied for entrance to West Point but did not pass the physical examination. Although he was unable to reach his goal of serving humanity through military service, Bellamy remained interested in and inspired by army life; while one of his short stories, “An Echo of Antietam,” is set during the American Civil War, this fascination is most obvious in his creation of the regimented “industrial army” in Looking Backward.¹³

After attending Union College for “a few weeks only” and traveling in Europe with his cousin, William Packer, Bellamy studied law and joined the bar in 1871. He discovered that the legal profession was less heroic than he had envisioned it, however, and after finding himself representing the landlord rather than the widow in his first case he closed his practice permanently. Although he

¹² Bellamy, “How I Wrote ‘Looking Backward,’” Edward Bellamy Speaks Again!, 218, 220-1.

¹³ Bowman, 18-9.

gave up being a lawyer, his writing tended to reflect his legal training as he presented his arguments in a clear and logical manner.¹⁴

Even while he was between jobs, Bellamy was convinced that he had a life of great work ahead of him. Writing in a notebook in September of 1871, he appeared self-assured to the point of being overconfident, saying: “I cannot turn my heart from the great work which awaits me. It is a labor none other can perform.” Neither did he soon lose his self-confidence; a year later in that same notebook he dramatically wrote, “Either I must be far more than others or nothing.” Where Edward Bellamy the novelist was quiet and humble, Edward Bellamy the young editor possessed a sense of ambition that pushed him to find a way to make a lasting impression on society.¹⁵

Bellamy obtained his first position as a writer with the help of his cousin William and in November of 1871 took up residence in New York City where he wrote editorials for the New York Evening Post. Although he only spent about seven months in the city, he was yet positively affected by his experiences; in the farewell he wrote to his room, he looked back on the deep thoughts and “profound” hours he experienced there. He returned home to Chicopee Falls in June of 1872 following the receipt of a letter from his father informing him that two Springfield newspapers, the Republican and the Union, were undergoing

¹⁴ Biographical information as written by Edward Bellamy, August 24, 1887, MS Am 1181 (47), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University; Bowman, 37.

¹⁵ Notebook #1, MS Am 1181.5 (1), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

changes and recommending that he apply to one of them for a job. Choosing the Union, Bellamy worked as a literary editor and editorial writer for five and a half years.¹⁶

Initially a relatively insignificant evening paper, the Springfield Union became strong competition for Samuel Bowles's nationally known Springfield Republican as the result of a broken partnership. In 1872, Bowles decided to downsize his business and dissolve the partnership that governed it, separating the printing and binding departments from the business, along with the men who ran them. Clark W. Bryan and a group of others who were newly displaced by Bowles's decision purchased the Union in May of that year and quickly reestablished the paper as a challenger to the dominant Republican.

The Union easily increased subscriptions by opposing the Republican's political views. While his readership was for the most part staunchly Republican, Bowles had chosen to support Democrat and newspaperman Horace Greeley's bid for the presidency in 1872, thus angering many of his readers and friends. The editor believed that Greeley would not make an ideal president, but he did not want to see Ulysses S. Grant elected to another term. Considering Greeley to be the lesser of two evils, Bowles defended the candidate as far as he was willing and spoke highly of Greeley's ability to appeal to Southern whites. America needed a full reconciliation between the North and South, Bowles felt, and Greeley's commitment to the same idea made him the more appealing candidate. Despite

¹⁶ Bowman, 38-40; Notebook #1, MS Am 1181.5 (1), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Bowles's best efforts he was unable to sway local opinions, so Bryan capitalized on the opportunity to establish a readership for himself and competition for his former partner.¹⁷

Bellamy had a fixed idea of what the function of a newspaper should be. In an unpublished paper that probably dates from the early 1870s, he wrote that newspapers should be governed by a sense of social responsibility. Titled "The Liberty of the Press: Its Uses and Abuses," the paper accuses editors of regularly abusing the public trust by using their newspapers "as an engine of personal persecution" and including unnecessarily shocking material in their articles. A good newspaper should keep readers informed of public affairs, helping to maintain interest in the republican government that made freedom of the press possible; it should feel free to address issues from a different point of view, but it should not mislead its readers. Editors were not the only ones to blame for the quality problems associated with newspapers, however—Bellamy also believed that anyone who purchased a libelous paper had no right to complain about its contents because with that purchase the reader was only helping to perpetuate the problem.

Bellamy seemed particularly disenchanted with the medium by the time he wrote Looking Backward. Discussing the evils of privately owned newspapers, Dr. Leete remarks that published opinions in the nineteenth century tended to be "crude and flippant, as well as deeply tinctured with prejudice and bitterness. In

¹⁷ George S. Merriam, The Life and Times of Samuel Bowles, vol. 2 (New York: The Century Co., 1885) 191, 194, 201, 204-5.

so far as they may be taken as expressing public opinion, they give an unfavorable impression of the popular intelligence, while so far as they may have formed public opinion, the nation was not to be felicitated.” Rather than unproductively attacking others or publishing poorly reasoned opinions, Bellamy believed that newspapers should cultivate a sense of social responsibility—for example, by maintaining “the practice already inaugurated, of investigating and publishing the conditions of public buildings as to exposure to conflagration”—and promote social improvement within their pages.

Bellamy’s views on the role of the press dictated how he wrote his own columns. Feeling that newspapers should stimulate rather than replace independent thought, he reviewed a wide range of books—both fiction and nonfiction—and structured his editorials so that they demonstrated his careful patterns of thought without forcing his opinions on the reader. Just as he spoke about and defended Looking Backward with confidence after its publication, the logical style of his editorials reflects the strength of his convictions. Unlike many newspaper editors of his day, Bellamy did not need to be reassured of others’ support before expressing an idea because, he thought, “Real strength can stand up tolerably erect if it hasn’t all the world to lean against.”¹⁸

¹⁸ “The Liberty of the Press: Its Uses and Abuses,” MS Am 1181.4 (46) by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University; Bowman, 40; “Concerning Newspapers,” Articles Written by Edward Bellamy in the Springfield Union, Paul Bellamy Papers; Bellamy, Looking Backward, 81; “The Lesson of the Fifth Avenue Fire,” Springfield Daily Union, January 3, 1873; “Reading the Newspapers,” Springfield Daily Union, July 14, 1874.

Some of the opinions that Bellamy confidently expressed concerned current political and economic events. He tended to consider both of these subjects from a broader perspective, discussing national, and even international, trends or events instead of writing only about the Springfield area. While he did not believe that the government itself needed much changing (Bellamy firmly believed in the importance of democracy throughout his life), he had much to say on the subject of the economy, often offering readers suggestions to help them deal with the depression that lasted through most of the 1870s.

As he would demonstrate in some of his fiction—particularly Looking Backward and an early short story, “Jane Hicks”—Bellamy took an interest in the well being of the members of the lower classes. Addressing the issue of poverty in 1873, he wrote that “Labor has rights as well as trade and capital,” and stated that workers should be paid fairly for their labor. Workers agreed; throughout the 1870s, strikes increased in number and frequency. Localized strikes such as those at the textile mills in Massachusetts and the coal mines in Pennsylvania gave way to strikes that affected larger portions of the country and included the railroad strike of 1877. Bellamy admitted in his editorial that he had no solutions for the complex labor problem, but as the decade progressed and the economic situation worsened, he continued to follow labor issues closely.¹⁹

The depression of the 1870s was a recurring theme in Bellamy’s editorials. Beginning in 1873 with a panic that followed the failure of Jay Cooke and

¹⁹ “Keeping the Wolf from the Door,” Articles Written by Edward Bellamy in the Springfield Union, Paul Bellamy Papers; Painter, 15-7.

Company, a major banking firm, the depression lasted five years. By 1876, three million people had lost their jobs and eighteen thousand businesses had failed. Comparing men like Cornelius Vanderbilt to feudal lords, Bellamy worried that more failures such as that of Jay Cooke's business would leave tens of thousands to suffer the consequences. The mood of the economy two months after the panic led the writer to make one of his first published remarks on socialism: "It is the dream of socialism to introduce democracy into the industrial world also, but whether it be realizable, experience only can show." As the economy continued to worsen and the country endured another depression in the early 1880s, Bellamy had more reason to consider whether socialism could prevent the crises that were beginning to seem like "necessary evils."²⁰

At first, Bellamy did not think that the financial crisis was going to be as long lasting and difficult as it turned out to be. In 1874, he advised readers to take advantage of the time off that the economic downturn afforded and "call the dull times a device of Providence for compelling a harassed and hard working generation to take a rest in spite of itself," perhaps seeing unemployment as a way to escape the poor conditions of the workplace without risking the consequences of going on strike. By 1876, however, he realized the naïveté of his comments and began encouraging his audience to take advantage of whatever employment they could find. Bellamy clearly felt that American workers were overworked

²⁰ Roy Morris, Jr., Fraud of the Century: Rutherford B. Hayes, Samuel Tilden, and the Stolen Election of 1876 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003) 17, 24; "The Industrial Feudalism of Modern Times," Springfield Daily Union, November 3, 1873; Bellamy, Looking Backward, 114.

and abused by their employers, but as the depression wore on he seems to have accepted that for many capitalism was necessary for survival.²¹

Bellamy's early suggestion for fixing the economic situation, while unsurprisingly optimistic, also provides a glimpse of some ideas that appeared in Looking Backward. Adopting a somewhat radical approach, he posited that "if the great wielders of the nation's wealth, and the lesser holders of it, in proportion, would take up and carry on this system of liberal remuneration, either in wages, or besides these, in some division of profits, to their workingmen," the nation's problems would be solved. As in his utopian novel, he also expressed his belief that social and economic issues were closely related. His proposed plan, he suggested, "would inaugurate an era of honor and honesty in society which would bear fruit in much needed ways. The sentiment of friendliness would gain steadily upon its corroding opposite; and people would not go scowling about as they now do, 'cursing inwardly,' and sometimes loud enough to be heard."²²

The political climate of the 1870s was also in need of improvement. The Democrats had gained a majority in the House of Representatives during the 1874 elections because of the depression, scandal plagued the Grant administration, and the outcome of the presidential election of 1876 was determined not by the American people but by the fifteen men on the specially appointed Electoral

²¹ "Dull Times a Blessing in Disguise," Springfield Daily Union, June 13, 1874; "The Conditions of Business Prosperity," Springfield Daily Union, August 16, 1876.

²² "How Confidence Can Be Restored," Springfield Daily Union, February 10, 1874.

Commission. Despite these serious problems, however, Bellamy favored making few changes to the political system, preferring to trust the system already in place. During the week after election day in 1876, Bellamy published an editorial titled “Moralities in Politics.” While he hypothesized that increasing the length of a president’s term to six years would force the president to pay more attention to the nation’s problems and less to his own, Bellamy preferred not to experiment with change. Nor did the Constitution in general need any altering; the past one hundred years had proven that it worked, and so it did not require improvement. Even in Looking Backward in which he describes a country without states, he still preserves the basic structure of government; Congress still exists, department heads are comparable to Cabinet members, and the nation still has a president, although the general population is no longer allowed to vote for him.²³

What did need changing, Bellamy wrote, were the people in government. While he did not think that personal character should be a greater determinant in elections than the principles men stood for, he did feel that too many people were making politics “their trade, their business and very likely their gambling capital,” focusing too much on personal gain and too little on the needs of constituents. The party system as a whole needed improvement so as to reduce the amount of government corruption; nominations for office should be “based more upon real and less upon factitious claims” in order to make voting seem less like a choice

²³ Morris, 2, 24-5; Bellamy, Looking Backward, 93; “Moralities in Politics,” Springfield Daily Union, November 17, 1876; “Tinkering the Constitution,” Springfield Daily Union, December 5, 1876.

“between the greater and lesser of two evils.” Bellamy also urged parties to respect the intelligence of voters and stop “ascribing all the evils which humanity suffers to the neglect of their particular nostrum.” The writer later offered solutions to these problems in Looking Backward, eliminating corruption along with inequality and greed. More complicated is the novel’s treatment of political parties; while the rise of the national party was necessary to bring about the great social and economic changes, Bellamy’s plan eventually eliminated the need for parties altogether.²⁴

Bellamy also had definite ideas about suffrage. At age seventeen, he began a notebook titled “Thoughts Upon Political Economy” in which he recorded his thoughts on various aspects of government. “Manhood alone is not a sufficient qualification for the exercise of the power of suffrage,” he wrote; a man also had to be intelligent, a qualification which could be proven by his ability to read. Concerning women, while he thought they deserved the right to vote, he wrote in an editorial they should acquire it only through legal processes when the country was ready to accept such a change. His views on the matter changed little between the 1870s and the publication of Looking Backward; while the members of his fictional society have generally accepted the equality of women, only men

²⁴ “The Shame and the Salvation of Popular Government,” Springfield Daily Union, March 4, 1873; “The Head and the Tail Changing Places,” Springfield Daily Union, April 3, 1874.

who have experience in and a clear understanding of the industrial army are allowed to vote for the president.²⁵

Bellamy's personal papers demonstrate that the author had begun thinking about political and social change even before joining the staff of the Springfield Union. In an essay dated to early 1872, he described his vision of "the Union of all the nations of the world in one political association: the federation of the world," a process which he felt could easily begin within the next century because of the global interconnection already brought on by the invention of the printing press, telegraph, and steam engine. He thought that such a union was the only way to attain lasting world peace, and that the only right that people would have to give up would be the "right to do lawless violence to their neighbors."

Bellamy strongly advocated peace; in an editorial titled "History in the Future," he wrote: "It is time to be teaching the people that not only has peace her victories as well as war, but that these are every way nobler, and that their recital has the elements of a far stronger attractiveness to the average mind than the usual sulphurous bulletins of the battle field." Occurring quickly and completely in the not-too-distant future, the victory without war that he sought in unifying the world is strikingly similar to the nonviolent revolution in Looking Backward. While this strong aversion to violence seems somewhat strange, particularly considering that Bellamy aspired to a career as a military officer and had a continued

²⁵ "Thoughts Upon Political Economy," MS Am 1181.5 (13), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University; "Woman Suffrage," Springfield Daily Union, November 25, 1872; Bellamy, Looking Backward, 94.

fascination with the army, it speaks to a larger truth about war which Bellamy seems to have recognized: a war's victor may implement change, but rarely completely and not without inspiring resentment among members of the losing side, such as in the case of Reconstruction following the American Civil War.²⁶

Social issues such as race relations and reform movements regularly came up in Bellamy's writings. Unlike many Americans, he believed that no one, regardless of race, religion, or background, should be segregated from the rest of the population. He wrote that "If we have got to give a different corner of the country to each of the score of races and religions which divide the American people, it is time we wound up our experiment in republican government entirely," demonstrating that he saw tolerance as being important to the country's success. Decoration Day in 1874 gave Bellamy occasion to praise the nation's progress toward unity in at least one respect; the planned observances mourning Civil War casualties from both the North and South marked an irreversible healing of the country's wounds. Despite the persisting problems of racism, sectionalism, and other forms of prejudice, he maintained his optimism that society could overcome such issues, creating in Looking Backward a society so perfect that, to its members, inequality is more difficult to fathom than the sharing of a national identity.²⁷

²⁶ Edward Bellamy, [Union of Nations], MS Am 1181.4 (59), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University; "History in the Future," Springfield Daily Union, June 15, 1875.

²⁷ "Circumstances alter cases" and "Decoration Day [1874]," Articles Written by Edward Bellamy in the Springfield Union, Paul Bellamy Papers.

Although considered a social reformer himself, Bellamy opposed reform movements such as the temperance, suffrage, and the anti-secret society movements. To him, it was one thing to want to improve society by altering a public practice; it was quite another to try to change people's personal habits. He did, however, advocate social responsibility, and he always assumed that human nature tended to approve of positive social change. He also believed that human nature—or at least, in America—was predisposed to oppose war. As he explained in Looking Backward, it was not people who needed reforming but society as a whole, and such a reform could be brought about peacefully.²⁸

These beliefs, though long-held, were the subjects of the most common early criticisms of Looking Backward. Attacking its seemingly unrealistic assumptions about human nature, the lack of room for individuality in the society of the future, and the convenient omission of any hint of an explanation regarding how the revolution came about, critics also proposed that drastic reform was not only unrealistic but unnecessary. Writing in the October 1889 issue of The Forum, for example, W.T. Harris informed readers that, although it could be categorized along with the work of Charles Dickens and Harriet Beecher Stowe as a novel of social reform, Bellamy's proposal of revolution was too much like throwing the baby out with the bathwater or treating an illness by getting rid of the infected body. Bellamy, however, refused to take offense to the negative

²⁸ "Minding One's Own Business: A Lost Art," Springfield Daily Union, April 21, 1874; "Decoration Day [1873]," Articles Written by Edward Bellamy in the Springfield Union, Paul Bellamy Papers.

remarks made about Looking Backward, instead welcoming criticism and even enthusiastically responding to his detractors. As he cheerfully stated in one essay, he read criticism “with greater interest, if not greater pleasure, than the congratulatory notices” and was “on the lookout for valuable criticisms and suggestions” to improve his industrial plan.²⁹

Bellamy’s portrayal of a peaceful transition from the old system to the new provoked accusations that he had either grossly changed or completely ignored basic aspects of human nature. A reviewer for the Atlantic Monthly, for example, argued that an entire society could never so easily agree to a redistribution of wealth. However, Bellamy had anticipated such accusations and addressed the issue in his book. From his nineteenth-century perspective, West remarks that human nature as he understands it is incompatible with the idea that laborers would willingly work to their full potential, whatever that may be, only to be compensated the same as everyone else. Dr. Leete responds that in fact human nature has not changed, and the government offers incentives as motivation: “Now that industry of whatever sort is no longer self-service, but service of the nation, patriotism, passion for humanity, impel the worker as in your day they did the soldier.” By applying the high standards maintained by the

²⁹ W.T. Harris, “Edward Bellamy’s Vision,” The Forum, vol. 8 (New York: Forum Publishing Company, 1890) 200, 202; Edward Bellamy, “‘Looking Backward’ Again,” Edward Bellamy Speaks Again!, 179.

military to the entire workforce, Bellamy argued, Americans would be motivated not by money but honor, resulting in an even higher level of productivity.³⁰

More frustrating than the problem of human nature to some critics were the constant references to a revolution that was never actually explained. Speaking of nineteenth-century laborers, the novel's protagonist observes: "Though they knew something of what they wanted, they knew nothing of how to accomplish it [...]." Bellamy could be described the same way. He recognized the flaws of the Gilded Age, and he knew what he wanted a changed society to look like; what he did not know was how to peacefully bring about that change. As the reviewer from the Atlantic Monthly wrote: "Mr. Bellamy has also blinked the most valuable part of his subject: an explanation, namely, of the process by which the change was brought about." To him and other readers, the absence of such details made the novel unbelievable, its ideas not worth considering.³¹

At least one reader was not bothered by Bellamy's inability to elaborate on how to achieve his utopian vision. Adopting a biblical metaphor, H.P. Peebles, president of the Los Angeles National Club wrote: "Bellamy is the Moses of today. He has shown us that a promised land exists; he has answered, disconcerted, and put to shame the wise men of the modern Pharaoh, and has beckoned to us from the house of bondage and the land of slavery. [...] [A]nd now that the Moses has appeared, let us labor and wait for the coming Joshua, to

³⁰ Bellamy, Looking Backward, 46-7; "Recent American Fiction," Atlantic Monthly, vol. 61 (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Company, 1888) 845.

³¹ Bellamy, Looking Backward, 7; "Recent American Fiction," Atlantic Monthly, 846.

lead us into the promised land.” In effect, Peebles believed that it was enough that Bellamy had inspired a movement; the writer could not be expected to bring about change single-handedly. As will be discussed in the next chapter, radicals agreed with the idea that Bellamy should not be expected to lead the revolution, but they did so because they believed that class struggle was necessary and that members of the middle class could not effectively head the sort of movement they envisioned.³²

While Bellamy saw his system as providing a life of contentment for everyone, others saw it as a means of abolishing individuality. The reviewer from the Atlantic Monthly—not surprisingly—also took up this issue, complaining that “each person becomes hardly more than a puppet, moved by the will of the whole people.” W.T. Harris, the United States’ Commissioner of Education, wrote that “the competitive system is a perpetual education in individuality, while the nationalistic system would be entirely devoid of such educative influence, except so far as it provoked its subjects to revolt or revolution.” Although unifying the country through nationalization might seem like a good idea, critics argued, the regimented workforce and social equality would only prevent people from developing unique identities and create an incredibly dull society. The book’s author viewed the matter differently. As he had written in an essay fifteen years earlier, he felt that emphasis on individuality often led to feelings of isolation,

³² H. P. Peebles, “The Utopias of the Past Compared with the Theories of Bellamy,” Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine 15, no. 90 (June 1890): 577, in Making of America, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/ahj1472.2-15.090> (accessed March 1, 2009).

while “the instinct of solidarity” made one realize that “The universe never did and never will go on without him.”³³

As sales of Looking Backward increased and Nationalism spread, magazines continued to publish criticism of the book and its author. For example, the editors of the Atlanta Constitution feared that the book, like Uncle Tom’s Cabin thirty years earlier, might hold enough influence to change the laws governing private property yet again. In an article published in the August 1890 issue of the Forum and titled “Prophets of Unrest,” one critic stated that he saw no benefit in merging industries, believed such a system would eliminate feelings of responsibility to one’s family, and thought that nationalization “would soon give birth to a general revolt” because of the extreme dullness of everyday life under it. He did, however, concede that Bellamy had had one good idea; “One great improvement,” he wrote, was that “the preaching is by telephone and you can shut it off.”³⁴

Criticism also came from abroad. The Saturday Review, published in London, printed a review which told fans of Doctor Heidenhoff’s Process that they would be severely disappointed and called Looking Backward “a stupid book.” The reviewer acknowledged Bellamy’s cleverness, theorizing that he “is laughing at Socialism under the guise of being a convert,” but found fault with the

³³ “Recent American Fiction,” Atlantic Monthly, 845; Harris, 207; Edward Bellamy, “The Religion of Solidarity,” Selected Writings on Religion and Society, ed. Joseph Schiffman (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1955) 12-3.

³⁴ Morgan, 247; Goldwin Smith, “Prophets of Unrest,” Forum, vol. 9 (New York: Forum Publishing Company, 1891) 607, 609, 614.

plot—or lack thereof—and the author’s assumptions about human nature. One year later, the Saturday Review recognized the novel’s popularity but reiterated its previously stated position that it was not worth reading. This time the column said that Bellamy’s book “will be useful, as it will tend to reconcile even the most unfortunate to the actual conditions of existence,” suggesting that the futuristic society that Bellamy had created was so unpleasant in concept that no one would want to trade their present reality to be a part of it.³⁵

In February of 1888, the month following the book’s publication, the New York Tribune printed a more glowing review in which its author praised the “admirable skill and adroitness with which the whole complicated system is explained and defended” and determined that the novel’s faults were insignificant and not worth mentioning. Although noting the absence of a real plot and the limited number and depth of characters, the reviewer of Looking Backward for the June 1888 issue of Harper’s Magazine also spoke highly of the work; he observed that “there is a force of appeal in the book which keeps the attention, and which appears in the case of so many critics to have captivated the reason; and whether Mr. Bellamy is amusing himself or not with his conceit of the socialistic state as an accomplished fact, there can be no doubt that he is keenly alive to the defects of our present civilization.”³⁶

³⁵ “Novels,” Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art, vol. 65 (London: 1888) 356-7; “Novels,” Saturday Review, vol. 67 (London: 1889) 509.

³⁶ “A New Utopia,” New York Tribune, February 5, 1888; “Editor’s Study,” Harper’s New Monthly Magazine 77, no. 457 (June 1888): 154, in Making of

Looking Backward and its author attracted the attention, praise, and criticisms of many notable people of the late nineteenth century as well. For example, Col. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, writer and Civil War veteran, and Julia Ward Howe, author of “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” not only approved of Bellamy’s ideas but also became members of the First Nationalist Club of Boston. Higginson had found the idea of an industrial army appealing—as did other retired military officers—while Howe joined the club with Higginson’s encouragement. On the other side of the issue, writer and politician Henry George felt that nationalization would infringe on personal freedom, and William Lloyd Garrison, son of the famous abolitionist, strongly agreed.³⁷

An admirer of Bellamy’s work since the publication of Doctor Heidenhoff’s Process, William Dean Howells thought Looking Backward an important book. Admitting that he would have preferred that life in the year 2000 be “much more independent of modern inventions, modern conveniences, modern facilities” than Bellamy proposed, Howells yet spoke highly of his friend’s ability to “make the airy stuff of dreams one in quality with veritable experience.” He found Bellamy’s metaphor comparing nineteenth-century society to a carriage drawn by slaves to be especially poignant and the chapter in which West thinks he has only been dreaming of the perfect society even more so. What Howells was particularly interested in was not the content of Bellamy’s story but its style; in

America, <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/moa/moa-cgi?notisid=ABK4014-0077-17> (accessed March 1, 2009).

³⁷ Morgan, 248-50, 393, 399.

Looking Backward, as well as in his earlier novels and stories, Bellamy appeared particularly skilled in communicating his ideas to the common man.³⁸

Another fan of Looking Backward was the novelist, humorist, and social critic best known as Mark Twain. Having read the book in November of 1889 and finding it “fascinating,” Twain soon after made the author’s acquaintance and expressed his agreement that organized labor was a necessary part of improving life for workers. Howells, who was also a friend of Twain, noted a similarity between the latter’s A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court and Bellamy’s novel, remarking that one could not read A Connecticut Yankee “and not be aware of the length and breadth of his [Twain’s] sympathies with poverty.” Unlike Bellamy, however, Twain did not propose any solutions to the problem, and while he agreed with Bellamy’s ideas, he never joined the Nationalist—or any related—movement.³⁹

Although he eagerly looked forward to reading the novel after “a dozen of the best fellows” recommended that he do so, the poet Walt Whitman was much less impressed. He at first found the book “curious and interesting,” but according to his friend, Horace Traubel, when asked what he thought of Looking Backward Whitman replied that he had no intention of finishing it. Feeling that all groups (socialists, anarchists, etc.) had a place in the world, he nevertheless

³⁸ Howells, The Blindman’s World, vi-vii, ix.

³⁹ Frederick Anderson, ed., Mark Twain’s Notebooks and Journals, vol. 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) 526-7; William Dean Howells, Literary Friends and Acquaintance: A Personal Retrospect of American Authorship (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1968) 283, 308.

thought that no one agency could reform society on its own and was unwilling to support the Nationalist movement. Coincidentally, the two men shared a dislike of the other's writing; a little more than a decade earlier in the pages of the Springfield Union, Bellamy had criticized the "onslaught upon the laws of rhyme and rhythm" he saw in Whitman's work.⁴⁰

Some organizations and movements publicly endorsed the ideas found within Looking Backward, creating a symbiotic relationship between the book and its supporters. On one hand, the interest shown by various groups was able to increase the novel's popularity and sales; on the other, Bellamy's work provided an alternative way for them to spread their messages and increase membership. Organizations from the Woman's Temperance Union to labor unions, the Theosophists to Christian Socialists, and the Grangers to the National Council of Women found the book to be supportive of their causes, and some, such as the People's Party, derived their platforms from parts of Looking Backward. The sending of free copies to new subscribers of certain periodicals, as well as distribution by private individuals, also helped promote the book and increase its popularity. Helena Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society, went so far as to praise Bellamy's plan as a key step on the path to universal brotherhood in

⁴⁰ Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, vol. 5, ed. Gertrude Traubel (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964) 393, 395, 426-7; Horace Traubel, With Walt Whitman in Camden, vol. 6, ed. Gertrude Traubel and William White (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982) 46; "Literary Notices [September 11, 1873]," Articles Written by Edward Bellamy in the Springfield Union, Paul Bellamy Papers.

her book, The Key to Theosophy, the second most important text to members of her organization.⁴¹

While many sought to apply Bellamy's ideas of social and economic reform on a national level, particularly through the advancement of the Populist Party, others focused their efforts more locally. In Omaha, Nebraska, in 1890, for example, a local paper reported that "Omaha will soon have an apartment house that will be built according to the Edward Bellamy idea." More specifically, its builder intended that it would be entirely cooperative in nature, complete with a common kitchen and shared living expenses. Socialist colonies, which were social experiments inspired partly by Looking Backward and partly by Laurence Gronlund's Cooperative Commonwealth, appeared around the United States as well. Although such colonies espoused many of the principles found in his book, Bellamy himself was opposed to forming such communities because he felt the focus should remain on change at the national level.⁴²

Whether or not they agreed with the ideas it contained, audiences were fascinated with Looking Backward and eagerly took part in the debates it inspired. According to the New York Times, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, the book's second publisher, reported in July of 1889 that between one thousand and fifteen hundred copies of the paperback edition were being sold each week. Further, total sales of the novel had reached 112,010 by September 23 of that

⁴¹ Bowman, 119, 121; Morgan, 264-5.

⁴² "A Bellamy Apartment House," New York Times, November 16, 1890; Lipow, 87-8.

year. Less than two years after the publication of the first American edition, Rabbi Solomon Schindler translated the text into German, and as of Bellamy's death in May of 1898 Europeans could also purchase editions in Spanish, French, and Italian.⁴³

In 1893, the Forum published a study of the most popular novels in America as determined by comparing lists of the top 150 most requested books in major libraries around the country. According to the survey, forty-four percent of libraries listed Looking Backward as being in high demand. Charles Dickens's David Copperfield was the most popular book at the time, read in ninety-two percent of libraries, and Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin was in demand in eight-six percent of the cases. In a list of most popular authors, Bellamy tied for forty-seventh, his standing based solely on the demand for Looking Backward. Dickens topped the list; Nathaniel Hawthorne, to whom William Dean Howells liked to compare Bellamy, ranked seventh; Howells himself was twenty-sixth; and Stowe came in eleventh. Bellamy's and Looking Backward's relatively high standings on these lists were impressive, but not necessarily surprising. The novel overwhelmingly appealed to members of the educated middle classes with its vision of a society that is free of class distinctions yet preserves their lifestyle and privileges. For those less involved in social reform movements, Looking Backward contrasted the poor conditions of the

⁴³ "Literary Notes," New York Times, July 15, 1890 and September 23, 1890; "Edward Bellamy Dead," New York Times, May 23, 1898.

1880s with the bright society of the future, explaining the problems with capitalism in easily understood terms.⁴⁴

While Bellamy had always been interested in social and economic issues—as his editorials and personal papers demonstrate—the birth of his children ultimately inspired him to write Looking Backward. Recognizing that “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,” he decided to devise such a plan with the hope that his children would continue to live comfortably after his death. Although many critics did not share his optimism concerning society’s willingness to change, Bellamy still managed to convince thousands of readers that just as the population was “ready indeed to pour out their lives without stint for the nation’s weal” during the Civil War, so would it willingly accept the creation of an industrial army and utopian state for the good of the people.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Hamilton W. Mabie, “The Most Popular Novels in America,” Forum, vol. 16 (New York: Forum Publishing Company, 1894) 508-10; Lipow, 97, 136.

⁴⁵ Bellamy, “How I Wrote ‘Looking Backward,’” Edward Bellamy Speaks Again!, 222-223; “Decoration Day [1873],” Articles Written by Edward Bellamy in the Springfield Union, Paul Bellamy Papers.

CHAPTER 4 “NATIONALISTIC PROPAGANDA”: THE NEW NATION AND EQUALITY

The publication of Looking Backward marked a great shift in Edward Bellamy’s focus. No longer was he a writer of short stories and romance novels; the quiet, self-proclaimed “homebody” had become a leader of the social movement known as Nationalism. Returning to journalism, from 1891 to 1894 he published the New Nation, a weekly paper dedicated to promoting Nationalism. Just as his early fiction and editorials for the Springfield Union had helped him to shape his ideas for a reformed society, his activities in the years following Looking Backward’s publication allowed Bellamy to develop the themes of his ideological masterpiece, the novel Equality (1897). While lesser known than Looking Backward, the work he produced from 1888 to 1898, the final decade of the author’s life, most clearly demonstrates his strong desire for reform.

Thirteen years before the publication of Looking Backward, Bellamy recognized that society (with exceptions) preferred to ignore unattractive realities in hopes that they would go away rather than attempt to fix them. “Only a conventional scope of ideas finds utterance,” he complained in a journal entry in 1875; “The rest are ignored.” During the 1890s, now that more of society was beginning to pay attention to social issues, Bellamy wholeheartedly committed himself to promoting his ideas. This dedication extended to giving up producing

fiction and included declining an opportunity to write a new serial for the Atlantic Monthly. As he explained to the magazine's editor: "[...] since my eyes have been opened to the evils and faults of our social state and I have begun to cherish a clear hope of better things, I simply 'cant get my consent' to write or think of anything else." Bellamy's new commitment also meant having to place himself in the national spotlight; the man whose only public appearances had been two presentations at the Chicopee Falls Lyceum twenty years earlier was now receiving numerous invitations to speak around the country.¹

While his fragile health prevented him from traveling far from home, Bellamy did give several talks in Massachusetts. By 1891 the settings of these talks were political gatherings, but during the first few years after the publication of Looking Backward the few crowds he spoke before were comprised entirely of Nationalists. Unsurprisingly, considering the high demand for appearances, Bellamy drew large crowds; around two thousand people were present at the observance of the Nationalist Club of Boston's second anniversary. Despite his reputation for being an engaging speaker, however, the quiet Bellamy preferred promoting Nationalism in private conversation—or writing about it in a newspaper—to lecturing about it to a crowd.²

While he was speaking and writing about social and economic issues, others were speculating on whether Bellamy would ever hold public office. The

¹ Notebook #1, MS Am 1181.5 (1), and typed copy of a letter to Mr. Scudder from Edward Bellamy, August 25, 1890, MS Am 1181 (73), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University; Bowman, 127.

² Bowman, 127.

Boston Herald wrote in 1892 that if the People's Party nominated Bellamy for governor of Massachusetts, he would bring recognition and credibility to the party's ticket. Others believed that the author actively sought an elected position. In 1890, the year Chicopee was incorporated as a city, the Buffalo News wrote that Bellamy was running for mayor and remarked, "It may be that after election he will be 'looking backward' for the votes he didn't get." Bellamy may or may not have considered running for local public office, but the notice taken by the press demonstrates the prominence he was gaining as a national figure.³

Nationalism, the movement begun by some of Bellamy's most ardent followers in 1888, borrowed its name and basic principles from the plan for the nationalization of industry found in Looking Backward. As Bellamy repeatedly explained, Nationalism was a specific movement within the broader category of socialism. Anyone who thought "the present social system to be radically wrong" and that the system "needs and is susceptible of radical reorganization" was a socialist, but only a person who desired wealth and leisure for all under a "perfectly organized industrial system" could be called a Nationalist. According to Bellamy's analysis, state socialism seems to have had the most in common with his own movement. Both proposed the abolition of capitalism, although state socialism did not advocate the equality of men and women, whereas Nationalism did. Anarchistic socialism—by which he meant revolutionary socialism in general—was the most radically different from Bellamy's movement; Nationalists

³ "Edward Bellamy for Governor," New York Times, June 19, 1892; [untitled], New York Times, August 31, 1890.

sought to bring about change through an “orderly evolution,” while anarchists generally employed more revolutionary methods.

Bellamy also disapproved of Marxist socialism, dismissing it as “a sort of confederation of industrial guilds, each controlling for its own benefit some province of industry.” Nor would Karl Marx have approved of Nationalism. Led by members of the American middle class, the movement was most similar to what Marx and Friedrich Engels in the “Manifesto of the Communist Party” had called bourgeois socialism—a plan by philanthropists, humanitarians, temperance advocates, and other middle-class reformers to have “all the advantages of modern social conditions without the struggles and dangers necessarily resulting therefrom.” Labor leader and Socialist party founder Eugene Debs made a similar observation; generally approving of Looking Backward, he was less enamored of the movement that followed, referring to it as the “Yankee Doodleisms of the Boston savants.” Like Marx, Debs felt that class struggle was necessary to the overthrow of capitalism, and he questioned the effectiveness of a middle-class movement for reform.⁴

According to Mark Twain, Nationalism appealed “Necessarily to the few: people who read, and dream, and are compassionate, and troubled for the poor and the hard-driven.” Whether or not these “few” truly understood the problems

⁴ “In the Interest of a Clear Use of Terms,” New Nation, December 12, 1891, 725-6; Lipow, 186; Nick Salvatore, Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982) 101; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” Social Class and Stratification: Class Statements and Theoretical Debates, ed. Rhonda F. Levine (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998) 35.

of the working class, they were determined to be heard. Initially organized to spread the word about Bellamy's goals for reform through the circulation of propaganda, Nationalist groups became politically active in 1891, supporting local Nationalist candidates and later the People's Party. Following the lead of the First Nationalist Club of Boston, which had formed in December of 1888, Nationalist clubs appeared along the east coast in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, and quickly spread westward in 1889 to places such as Minneapolis, Chicago, and San Francisco.⁵

Although there was no official national organization, the Nationalist clubs generally adopted the set of principles written by the First Nationalist Club of Boston. Many of the clubs also had one other factor in common; while promoting social and economic equality, they were often selective when accepting members. Wanting to be a movement not “of the proletariat but one for the proletariat,” clubs sought members who were educated and relatively successful and rejected applicants who were foreign, uneducated, or overzealous.⁶

This exclusiveness contributed to a divide in the Nationalist movement, with the Boston clubs epitomizing the two sides. The Second Nationalist Club of Boston was formed in October of 1889 in response to the principles of the first club, and, although believing in Bellamy's ideas just as firmly, supported a

⁵ Mark Twain, Christian Science in The Works of Mark Twain, vol. 19, ed. Paul Baender (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1973) 241; Bowman, 123-4, 127-8. Scholarship also refers to the First Nationalist Club of Boston as the Nationalist Club, Boston Bellamy Club, and variations thereof (Bowman, 125, 127).

⁶ Bowman, 125, 128.

different approach to their promotion. In terms of “revolution” versus “evolution,” the second club tended much more toward the former; while the First Nationalist Club preferred to discuss theory and doctrine, the Second Nationalist Club advocated playing a more active role in society and politics. Bellamy understood both points of view, a fact he demonstrated within the pages of the New Nation, but he also believed that postponing efforts to change the current system would only make the situation worse. He expounded on the immediacy of the problem both in writing and before a Nationalist gathering; on the occasion of the first anniversary of the First Nationalist Club of Boston he said: “The republic is being taken from us, but it is still possible to bring it back. Soon it will be too late to do so, but today there is yet time, though there is none to waste.”⁷

The Theosophical Society was one of the primary forces that organized the Nationalist clubs (and the Nationalist movement in general), but it was also partly the Theosophists’ involvement that led to the divide among groups. Founded in 1875 by Russian immigrant Helena Blavatsky and several Americans, the Theosophical Society’s objects included the creation of a universal brotherhood of humanity—a concept that Bellamy had embodied in the egalitarian society of Looking Backward. Two Theosophists, Cyrus Field Willard and Sylvester Baxter, were intrigued by this and other ideas in Looking Backward and wrote separately to Bellamy to propose the formation of “an association to support and propagate the Nationalist ideas of the book.” In July of 1888, the

⁷ Morgan, 252, 267-8; Edward Bellamy, “Nationalism—Principles, Purposes,” Edward Bellamy Speaks Again!, 58.

author wrote back, saying he supported the idea if they could find others who were willing to join.

The publication of Blavatsky's The Key to Theosophy with its endorsement of Looking Backward only increased interest in taking part in a Nationalist movement. In 1889 Theosophists from around the United States began writing to the First Nationalist Club of Boston for guidance in establishing their own clubs, and by June of 1890 there were over sixty clubs in California alone. As Abbott B. Clark, a Theosophist from California, explained, members of the local branches of the Theosophical Society formed their own Nationalist clubs because "From the beautiful spirit and range of knowledge manifest in his writings we counted Mr. Bellamy as one of us."⁸

However, although Theosophists helped encourage the spread of Nationalism, their Society's principles served as an obstacle to enacting reform. The Key to Theosophy, which had helped popularize Bellamy's novel, also contained a passage denying that the Theosophical Society had any aspirations to influencing governmental policy. Political reform was not the necessary first step in achieving universal brotherhood, Blavatsky wrote: "To seek to achieve political reforms before we have effected a reform in human nature, is like putting new wine into old bottles." Just as Henry Legate had chosen to form the Second Nationalist Club of Boston and keep it free of any association with the city's First Nationalist Club or its Theosophists, by the fall of 1890 Bellamy had decided to

⁸ Morgan, 248, 260-1; Abbott B. Clark, quoted in Morgan, 266.

separate himself from Willard, et al., and to focus his energy on inspiring people to action through the publication of his own weekly newspaper, which he titled the New Nation.⁹

Periodicals served as the primary means of promoting Nationalist ideas. The Nationalist was the first of these publications; started by members of the First Nationalist Club of Boston, the monthly magazine ran from May of 1889 to April of 1891 and contained articles on politics, industry, and reform, as well as news of Nationalism's progress around the country. According to Cyrus Willard, within the first year of the movement's formation, at least fifty papers and magazines in the United States were "unreservedly advocating Nationalism," and by 1890 England was home to a Nationalist publication as well. Nationalists also spread their message with printed works that were shorter in length; between May of 1889 and April of 1891, the First Nationalist Club of Boston alone distributed approximately 25,000 pamphlets.¹⁰

Bellamy finalized his plans to produce his own paper after the Nationalist ran into financial difficulty. Intended to "furnish a practical commentary upon the doctrine of a better social order based on economic equality which was set forth in Looking Backward," the weekly paper, titled the New Nation, committed itself to encouraging the nationalization of railroads and communications, criticizing the

⁹ H.P. Blavatsky, The Key to Theosophy, quoted in Morgan, 267; Morgan, 267, 273.

¹⁰ Bowman, 126-7, 129; Willard quoted in Morgan, 252; Morgan, 264.

current industrial system, and publishing reports and analysis of important events in America and around the world. The first issue appeared on January 31, 1891.¹¹

While the paper regularly contained numerous articles and letters providing commentary on current conditions and needed reforms, the Nationalists' positions were most clearly expressed through Bellamy's recurring feature, "Talks on Nationalism." Written as brief conversations between the fictional Mr. Smith, a Nationalist, and character types (a public speaker, farmer, pessimist, etc.), these short pieces explained in simple terms the principles behind the Nationalist movement. The first, "To a Seeker of Definitions," reiterates the principles that separate Nationalism from other forms of socialism, but does so in a question-and-answer format that makes it easier to follow than one of Bellamy's regular articles. Many elements of these conversations found their way into the writer's next and final novel, Equality, such as Smith's insistence that the movement did not advocate an end to private property ("only to private capitalism") and that Nationalism was but a natural extension of Christianity. The "Talks" remained informative even into the twentieth century as they were published in book form during the 1930s when the Great Depression led many to reevaluate Bellamy's work.¹²

Bellamy, long-standing opponent of any movement that sought to change personal habits, also used the New Nation to propose different approaches to

¹¹ Bowman, 126; "Announcement," New Nation, February 3, 1894, 49; "Prospectus," New Nation, January 31, 1891, 13.

¹² Edward Bellamy, Talks on Nationalism (Chicago: The Peerage Press, 1938) 24-30, 76, 165-8; Bellamy, Equality, 117, 267.

social reform. Rather than forcing the public to give up alcohol completely, for example, Bellamy adopted the argument that the state should take over the alcohol trade so that sales would “be conducted at cost by officials having no interest in the amount sold.” He thought that “eliminating the motive of profit on sales” would “correct the grossest evils of the traffic and greatly limit its volume,” as well as appease both the supporters of temperance and those of personal liberty. As he later explained within the pages of Equality, it made less sense to reform a single habit than it did to abolish the larger system that inspired heavy drinking and, by extension, violence and abuse.¹³

Of the various social and political movements that gained momentum during the 1880s and 1890s, Populism was the one most closely associated with Nationalism. Like Nationalists, supporters of the movement believed that the problem with government was not the extent of its authority but rather the influence of capital; according to the preamble to their 1892 platform, they even believed that the government’s power, as vested in the American people, should be expanded. Originating in failed or regional efforts such as greenbackism and the Farmers Alliance, the movement evolved into a viable third party, called the Populist or People’s Party, in time for the 1892 national elections and took hold in the American South and West.

In February of 1892, farmers, supporters of organized labor, and people generally dissatisfied with the state of politics convened in St. Louis, Missouri, to

¹³ “The Platform still further examined,” New Nation, October 17, 1891, 606; Bellamy, Equality, 134.

establish a national party that could challenge the dominant two. Comprised of members of the Prohibition Party, Knights of Labor, Christian Socialists, and other active reformers, the party made clear that it was advocating not socialism but improvement in the quality of life for the lower classes. As reformer Ignatius Donnelly explained in the preamble to the party platform, Populists, like Nationalists, sought “to restore the government of the Republic to the hands of the ‘plain people,’ with which class it originated.” A convention held in Omaha, Nebraska, at the beginning of July resulted in the creation of the party’s formal platform and the nomination of its first presidential candidate. Although it was the first ratified platform of the Populist Party, the Omaha Platform derived its principles from ideas that had been presented successively in the Cleburne Demands of 1886, the Dallas Demands of 1888, the St. Louis Platform of 1889, and the Ocala Demands of 1890. Among other things, populism stood for a ban on alien land ownership; unlimited gold and silver coinage; public ownership of the railroad, telephone, and telegraph industries; and increased rights for workers. Party members also sought the establishment of a graduated income tax and condemned “the maintenance of a large standing army of mercenaries, known as the Pinkerton system, as a menace to our liberties.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Lawrence Goodwyn, The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) 13, 26, 55; “The Omaha Platform, July 1892,” A Populist Reader: Selections from the Works of American Populist Leaders, ed. George Tindall (New York: Harper and Row, 1966) 92, 95; Michael Kazin, The Populist Persuasion: An American History (New York: Basic Books, 1995) 27-9, 42; Robert C. McMath, American Populism : A Social History, 1877-1898 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993) 167.

The populists dispersed writers and lecturers throughout the country in a grassroots effort to convince the farmers, miners, and workers of America that the People's Party was worth supporting. Expressing their hope that the state of the nation would be returned to that of the antebellum period, speakers often invoked the founding fathers and other men seen as democratic heroes, like Abraham Lincoln. In year before the platform of the People's Party had been established, Bellamy had employed a similar rhetorical strategy; on more than one occasion, for example, the writer praised Lincoln's warning about the negative effects of surrendering one's personal rights to capital.¹⁵

Although populism and Nationalism were two distinct movements, Bellamy relied on the successes of the People's Party to promote the Nationalist agenda. He did not personally attend the convention at Omaha, at which some Nationalists served as delegates, but Bellamy extolled the new platform of the People's Party as being "the largest opportunity yet presented in the history of our movement [Nationalism] to commend it to the masses of the country." As he saw it, the more attention the People's Party received, the easier it would be to gain support for the Nationalists' agenda, which addressed more issues and in greater detail than the political party was capable of doing. The New Nation also did its part to support Populist candidates; in addition to printing pro-Populist articles, its

¹⁵ Kazin, 39; "Lincoln's Prophecy," New Nation, December 5, 1891, 709-10.

staff offered to forward contributions for the campaign fund in Massachusetts to the state committee.¹⁶

The outcome of the 1892 elections demonstrated the nation's dissatisfaction with its major parties. James Weaver, the presidential nominee, received 8.5 percent of the total vote, and fifteen hundred Populist candidates were elected to office. While he was the first third-party candidate to win electoral votes since the Civil War, fraud and voter intimidation prevented Weaver from faring well in the South; instead, former president Grover Cleveland carried this region of the country and narrowly defeated the Republican incumbent, Benjamin Harrison.

Pleased that Americans wanted a change from the corrupt Republican leadership of recent years, Bellamy yet asserted that the Republican party would, as it did during the Civil War, help win a moral victory for the country. In the week after Cleveland's election he wrote: "The soul of the republican party while it lived was the moral sense of the people, and it will find its new body in the party which shall stand for the equality and brotherhood of men. The spirit of the republican party will be reincarnated in the coming nationalist party." This idea, like his plan for economic reform, was perhaps inspired by nostalgia for the scenes of his childhood. Just as he developed his plan for economic reform partly as a way to eliminate the negative influences of capitalism that he saw in his own hometown, he may have hoped that the heroic images he associated with the

¹⁶ Morgan, 282; Bellamy quoted in Bowman, 134; "After the Omaha Convention," New Nation, July 23, 1892, 471.

Republican party of his childhood would be able to inspire others to make change.¹⁷

Bellamy himself became more politically outspoken as populism gained popularity; while he had regularly commented on the state of American politics in his editorials of the 1870s, in 1891 he began accepting invitations to attend and speak at various conventions and rallies in Boston. However, while he publicly endorsed People's Party candidates and was listed on the 1892 party ticket as a presidential elector at large, his health prevented him from making long lecture tours or speaking at the World's Fair Labor Congress.¹⁸

Not all news printed in the New Nation was as encouraging as word of the People's Party's activities. Viewing the event as a sign that change was increasingly becoming necessary, Bellamy closely followed news of the steel workers' strike that took place at Homestead, Pennsylvania, in 1892. That year, the Homestead Works and the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers entered a series of failed negotiations over recognition of the union, wages, and the company's right to replace workers with new technology as the union sought to renew its contract with management. On June 28, Homestead Works manager Henry Clay Frick locked out eleven hundred of the company's disgruntled employees when they refused to accept his terms, and on July 1 the remaining twenty-four hundred employees at the mill refused to go to work.

¹⁷ Painter, 115-6; McMath, 176-7; "How Cleveland's Victory Prepares the Way for Nationalism," New Nation, November 19, 1892, 686-7.

¹⁸ Bowman, 135.

Having already constructed a fence around the property, Frick also hired men from the Pinkerton National Detective Agency to guard the mill so he could safely bring in strikebreakers. This was not the first time that Pinkerton agents served as a mercenary army to protect capitalists' interests; they had protected strikebreakers in the coal and railroad industries, among others, since the 1870s and served as a reminder to many workers of the capitalists' power. Early in the morning on July 6, as barges filled with Pinkertons approached the mill, Homestead workers and local residents stormed onto mill property so that the Pinkertons would be unable to land there. The workers won the battle that ensued, but one week later the Pennsylvania militia arrived to break the strike. Although the strike dragged on, by October 13 the militiamen had left Homestead, signaling its failure. Only four hundred of the twenty-two hundred strikers who reapplied at the company were rehired, leaving many families without a source of income.¹⁹

On June 25, a week before the strike, Bellamy noted Carnegie and Frick's fortification of the mill property as a sign of upcoming trouble but looked forward to the upcoming events, whatever they might be, for bringing more attention to the country's labor problems. Because the battle at Homestead was the bloodiest industry-related event since 1877, his belief that "Every strike is an argument of the most practical kind for nationalism, affording as it does a fresh demonstration of the incapacity of the private capitalist system to carry on the business of the

¹⁹ Painter, 111-2; William Serrin, Homestead: The Glory and Tragedy of an American Steel Town (New York: Times Books, 1992) 66-8, 74-7, 84-5, 89, 91.

country” led him to conclude that it would only increase interest in the Nationalist cause among people of all social classes. One month later, the editor felt justified in declaring that Nationalist sentiment was indeed growing, citing the “volume and character of the discussion in the press, on the pulpit and platform, and in legislative halls, of the Homestead tragedy.”²⁰

Bellamy viewed the battle of Homestead as an apocalyptic moment in labor history. In the weeks following the event, he commented that “[...] the chief significance of Homestead is not its own importance as a battle, but the fact that it is but the first battle of a great war, the end of which will bring the country in sight of nationalism.” Meant as a call to action rather than a prediction of a physical war, Bellamy’s remark accurately recognized the Homestead strike as the beginning of a longer struggle. Within the steel industry, the strike was the first of four failed attempts to gain recognition of steel workers’ unions; on a national level, the strikers’ failure demonstrated that because the government sided with capital, permitting companies to end strikes with whatever force was necessary (and sometimes providing it), unions seeking fair pay, improved working conditions, and recognition by management had a long way to go.²¹

Bellamy saw other events of 1892 as evidence that the railroads needed to be nationalized. Arguing that government ownership would guarantee high safety

²⁰ “Big Labor Troubles Ahead,” New Nation, June 25, 1892, 402; “The Homestead Tragedy,” New Nation, July 16, 1892, 450; “General Significance of the Events at Homestead,” New Nation, August 6, 1892, 497.

²¹ “General Significance of the Events at Homestead,” New Nation, August 6, 1892, 498; Painter, 114, 370.

standards on the rails and drastically reduce the number of accidents involving railroad employees, he gave the number of employees killed or injured in 1892 as 28,800, or more than twice the number of Union casualties at the battle of Antietam in 1862. The comparison of the number of accidents in a year to the outcome of the bloodiest day of the American Civil War made his argument for nationalization more poignant; railroad accidents were not “like the losses of the war, a chapter of history merely,” but instead occurred needlessly every day. Despite his use of strong imagery, however, Bellamy’s oft-repeated call for the nationalization of the railroads (and other industries) went unheeded.²²

A more immediate disappointment to Nationalist efforts came when Bellamy ended publication of the New Nation. The final issue of the paper, dated February 3, 1894, cited financial difficulties as the reason behind its indefinite suspension. However, while the number of subscriptions had declined because of the onset of yet another depression, the editor’s personal problems also contributed to the decision to end circulation; by 1893 Bellamy’s health had deteriorated to the point where he was submitting his articles by mail instead of making weekly trips to Boston. Despite his poor health, he assured readers that he would “continue to devote himself with unabated earnestness to the nationalistic propaganda, making use of the relief from editorial duties to take up other lines of work promising, possibly, a larger service to the cause than he

²² “Twenty-eight Thousand Eight Hundred Arguments for Nationalizing the Railroads,” New Nation, January 28, 1893, 51.

would have been able to render by continuing the publication of [the New Nation], had that been possible.”²³

Bellamy’s promise to continue promoting Nationalism was not an empty one; before his death in 1898, he published one last book, Equality (1897), in which he further explained his ideas. While out of print and generally forgotten, the novel started where Looking Backward left off and provided the most comprehensive and detailed plan for nationalization that its author had ever constructed. Bellamy himself had strong feelings about Equality, believing it to be the best novel he had ever written. However, the casual reader was less likely to agree. Concerning the depth and clarity of the ideas it contains, the novel surpasses Looking Backward, but its lecture-like format is a stylistic failure.²⁴

As was to be expected following the success of Looking Backward, Bellamy’s audience had high expectations for his next book. Equality was an instant bestseller; according to the New York Times, “It took precisely thirty-six hours for every copy of ‘Equality,’ written by Mr. Edward Bellamy, to be cleared off the shelves of the Messrs. D. Appleton & Co. of New York,” and the company was having difficulty keeping up with the demand. But while copies sold quickly, the novel was not as successful as Looking Backward in capturing the interest and attention of audiences.

Less of a novel and more of a prolonged lecture on the morality and wisdom of abolishing capitalism, Equality lacks the thread of romance found in

²³ “Announcement,” New Nation, February 3, 1894, 49-50; Bowman, 136-7.

²⁴ Bowman, 140.

Looking Backward, as well as any real plot. Another of the novel's issues is Bellamy's refusal to recognize that not all problems offer an easy choice between bad and good. For example, in Looking Backward, readers are left to assume that all citizens, rich and poor, readily embraced the revolution when it came about. Similarly, although Bellamy did acknowledge that there were some dissenters, he explained in Equality that the wealthy recognized the error in their ways and rejected the bad old system for the good new one.²⁵

Wanting to discuss issues that he was unable—or unwilling—to address in Looking Backward and respond to his numerous critics in a more popular medium, Bellamy began writing Equality in 1893. He originally intended to write a novel with a completely new storyline and cast of characters, but after beginning several unsuccessful drafts the author chose instead to revive Julian West and Dr. Leete. Looking back on his writing from the previous few years, Bellamy borrowed the best of his ideas and phrases from the numerous speeches and articles he had composed. Repetition, he believed, was necessary to making people recognize the problems of the current system and the benefits of the Nationalists' ideas, and so it logically followed that Equality would contain echoes of arguments he had made years earlier.²⁶

Bellamy used many of these recycled points to address what critics saw as the greatest problem of Looking Backward—the lack of detail about the revolution. Like the growth of the Nationalist movement, the social revolution

²⁵ “Books and Authors,” New York Times, July 7, 1897; Morgan, 416.

²⁶ Bowman, 132, 139.

(or, more aptly, evolution) occurred in two stages. The first, or incoherent, period was characterized by a recognition of the overarching social problems and an inability to do anything more effective in response to them than “blindly kicking in the dark against the pricks of capitalism”; the second, or rational, period produced better-organized movements and more coherent thought.²⁷

Perhaps intending to convince readers that great change was possible and inspire them to action, Bellamy defined the Revolution as having begun in 1873. According to a fictional history, the panic that occurred during that year and marked the beginning of a long depression “awoke Americans from their self-complacent dream that the social problem had been solved or could be solved by a system of democracy limited to merely political forms, and set them to seeking the true solution.” Bellamy expressed a similar statement in a speech at a People’s Party convention; “It was under the sobering influence of the great business collapse of 1873” that Americans first began to recognize the growing power of the capitalists. Despite this recognition and the organization of the labor movement, etc., that followed the panic, however, the author saw the 1870s and 1880s as “incoherent” because Americans were unable to realize that restoring the industrial system to prewar conditions would not be as positive a change as allowing the economy to evolve.²⁸

²⁷ Bellamy, Equality, 325, 330-1.

²⁸ Bellamy, Equality, 307, 333; “The Platform still further examined,” New Nation, October 17, 1891, 606.

The second, or rational, phase of the fictional revolution began in the 1890s. It was at this point that Americans realized a new system was needed to replace the broken system of capitalism, and a feeling of hope encouraged reformers to overcome their fear of the capitalists. Like the date of the beginning of the first stage of the revolution, Bellamy presumably intended the date of the revolution's second phase to be inspiring to readers. By the time the book appeared in 1897, the country had witnessed the strike at Homestead (1892), the beginnings of another depression (1893), and the Pullman workers' strike (1894), which, as at Homestead, had involved violence and demonstrated the government's preference for siding with capital. By telling readers that they were already several years into a period of revolution, he made his vision of economic equality seem that much more attainable.²⁹

Although the author does not provide any dates beyond the 1890s (perhaps implying that it was up to readers to fill in times and events for themselves), the revolution does follow a relatively specific series of events. Beginning with the municipalization and nationalization of transportation, utilities, mining, and communications, the government then went on to establish "public-service stores, where public employees could procure at cost all provisions of necessity or luxury previously bought at private stores," and which were based on the service stores that provided goods to soldiers. Afterward, the government gradually acquired

²⁹ Bellamy, *Equality*, 331, 334-5; Painter, 117, 123.

farms and factories until it owned all land, and the use of credit replaced the monetary system.³⁰

Not surprisingly considering his long-held interest in military service, Bellamy wanted his plan for an industrial army (now reconceptualized as “universal industrial service”) to be implemented with the application of a military maneuver. He compared the takeover to a flanking operation, in which “an army, instead of attacking its antagonist directly in front, moves round one of his flanks in such a way that without striking a blow it forces the enemy to leave his position.” Rather than attacking the capitalists and forcing collective ownership of property, the revolutionaries attacked the entire system, only replacing it with collective ownership when property had lost monetary value and capitalism had been destroyed. This well-orchestrated transition, like the success of the industrial system, demonstrates Bellamy’s opinion that the military’s discipline could—and should—be applied in peaceful situations instead of war.³¹

While Bellamy employed numerous images and analogies to convey the differences between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the most prevalent image in Equality is that of the slave. Moving beyond the metaphor of the coach drawn by slaves found in Looking Backward, the author regularly referred to the limitations placed on the working classes as being worse than those of slavery and compared the late nineteenth century’s employment practices with those of slave owners. In a more historical context, Bellamy considered the effects of slavery

³⁰ Bellamy, Equality, 353-8.

³¹ Lipow, 284; Bellamy, Equality, 352.

and emancipation and asserted that while debate over such issues was important, it delayed the revolution's beginning.

Dr. Leete explains: "But for [the abolition of slavery and its consequences], we may believe that the great Revolution would have occurred in America twenty-five years earlier. From the period of 1840 to 1870 the slavery issue, involving as it did a conflict of stupendous forces, absorbed all the moral and mental as well as physical energies of the nation." As he had previously done in a speech at a People's Party convention, Bellamy also emphasized that the country's preoccupation with battles over states' rights and slavery during the Civil War gave Northern businessmen an opportunity to expand their power and personal wealth relatively unnoticed. While he felt it was necessary to eliminate one form of slavery before attempting to rid society of another, at the same time he seemed to suggest that Americans tended to become distracted by a single issue and did not look often enough at the big picture.³²

Just as many workers had already done as they protested against what they called wage slavery, Bellamy used slavery as a metaphor for capitalists' business practices. Mindful that abstract terms are often challenging to define, Bellamy explained the value of securities and investments in terms of people instead of money. To members of his society of the future, words such as "rent," "interest," or "profits" had no meaning, except in the way they affected or represented human relationships in the nineteenth century. As Dr. Leete explains, it was the

³² Bellamy, *Equality*, 310; "The Platform still further examined," *New Nation*, October 17, 1891, 606.

unnamed “men and women who went with the lands, the machines, and various other things, and were bound to them by their bodily necessities, which gave all the value to the possession of the things.” A factory or farm was valueless without workers to run the machinery or harvest a crop. Likewise, a government-issued bond represented an investor’s ability to receive a return based on the output of work of an entire nation.³³

Bellamy explained the social and economic implications of trade in terms of slavery as well, criticizing both free trade and protectionism as being seriously flawed under capitalism. As one of the novel’s characters summarizes, under either policy a nation’s people could not win: “So long as the profit system was retained, it would be all one in the end, whether you built a wall around a country and left the people to be exploited exclusively by home capitalists, or threw the wall down and let in the foreigners.” Comparing the process to a race between ships rowed by slaves, Bellamy demonstrated that international competition for foreign markets had negative consequences as well. The party successfully reaching its goal in either competition would be declared the winner, but at the cost of its members, who had presumably been more severely abused. Under the capitalist system, it was not just industrial workers who felt particularly mistreated; with the closer connection between farmers and markets afforded by

³³ Bellamy, Equality, 94-5, 97.

the expansion of the telegraph and transportation during the 1880s came an increase in speculation and a deflation of crop values.³⁴

To Bellamy, the capitalist system was worse than slavery. While a slave was bought and sold without any say in the matter, a worker had to actively sell him- or herself, thereby demonstrating acceptance of the economic system: “[T]he slave might be compelled to yield to physical duress, but he could still keep a mind free and resentful toward his master; but in the relation of hire men sought for their masters and begged as a favor that they would use them, body and mind, for their profit or pleasure.” Because slaves did not have to prostitute themselves for survival, Bellamy believed that their condition was more dignified. He also argued that the evils of capitalism were farther reaching than slavery had been, declaring that while slaves could escape from their masters to freedom, a laborer could not leave his place of employment and be free of the effects of the capitalist system.³⁵

While he extensively compared capitalism to a form of slavery in both Looking Backward and Equality, Bellamy generally avoided the issue of race. Not having traveled much beyond the limits of Chicopee, Massachusetts, Bellamy may have omitted discussions of race simply because he had had few opportunities to observe racial tensions and did not see them as immediate a threat to society as he did capitalism. Alternatively, hoping to gain national support for his industrial plan, he may have intentionally ignored the issue so as not to

³⁴ Bellamy, Equality, 221; McMath, 44-5.

³⁵ Bellamy, Equality, 95-6, 101, 360-1.

alienate supporters from states where segregation and racial prejudice were inseparable characteristics of everyday life. Comments made several years earlier in the New Nation suggest a combination of these factors. In April of 1892, Bellamy remarked that “the people’s party has done more in two years to bury sectionalism and relegate the race issue to the background than the two old parties had accomplished in the previous 25 years or would have done in a hundred,” and in September of that year he wrote: “In the South, as in the North, the issue is soon to be drawn between capital and organized labor, and the political solidarity of the southern states will be threatened by another line of cleavage, running not with, but across, the race issue and confusing the color line.” The writer thought that enough progress had been made in socially unifying the various regions of the country to be able to address racial issues without inspiring much backlash, but, as in the case of women’s rights, he also seems to have believed that solutions to such problems would naturally follow economic reform.³⁶

In reality, alleviating racial tensions proved to be a persistent problem for the Populists, particularly in the South. Prior to the party’s organization in 1892, leaders of the Farmers’ Alliance reached out to their counterparts in the Colored Farmers’ Alliance, and afterward the occasional black delegate attended Populist conventions. Writing in 1892, one-term Congressman and 1896 Populist vice presidential candidate Thomas Watson wrote that “the People’s Party will settle the race question” by, among other things, “presenting a platform immensely

³⁶ “Edward Bellamy’s Speech,” New Nation, April 9, 1892, 233; “Labor, Politics and Nationalism,” New Nation, September 10, 1892, 568.

beneficial to both races and injurious to neither.” However, by 1894 in an attempt to sway voters away from the Democratic party, Southern Populists had changed their stance on social equality, publicly speaking out against it while still supporting equal voting rights. The Democrats, meanwhile, used voter fraud and intimidation to keep the Populists from gaining black votes. Differences of opinion limited the ability of black and white farmers to work together as well; the two groups had opposing views on economic issues such as Henry George’s Single Tax plan, and some black farmers were wary of cooperating with white landowners. Despite initial efforts toward racial equality, the Populists found it easier to accept current social conditions than to change them.³⁷

Bellamy did address racism in Equality, but he did so in a way that appears more appeasing than his previously published remarks. Almost as an afterthought toward the end of the novel, Julian West asks Dr. Leete how the South solved the problem of racial inequality that persisted even after the end of the Civil War. In a response that is less than a page in length, the doctor explains that because former slaves required “some sort of industrial regimen, at once firm and benevolent, administered under conditions which should meanwhile tend to educate, refine, and elevate its members,” the changes made during the revolution allowed them to acquire knowledge, skills, and social status on par with that of white people. However, when West inquires how people from certain regions came to overcome their prejudices and accept a system in which black and white

³⁷ McMath, 171-4, 197-8; Thomas E. Watson, “The Negro Question in the South,” A Populist Reader, 118, 124-5.

people were equal in society and the workplace, Leete replies: “Even for industrial purposes the new system involved no more commingling of races than the old one had done. It was perfectly consistent with any degree of race separation in industry which the most bigoted local prejudices might demand.”³⁸

While such a statement seems surprising considering the radical nature of many of Bellamy’s other ideas—including his assertion from over twenty years earlier that no group should be segregated from the rest of society—it probably came in response to the racist sentiments that remained strong throughout the country and had even intensified in recent years. Although the author may have believed that the growing concern over the widening gap between social classes would eclipse the focus on racial differences, the changing opinions of the People’s Party and the outcome of the Supreme Court case of Plessy v. Ferguson in May of 1896 demonstrated that racial tensions were deeply ingrained in American society. With a seven to one ruling in the court case, the justices determined that Judge John H. Ferguson was justified in upholding Louisiana’s Separate Car Act, and that legally mandating segregation was not illegal as long as the separate facilities were equal in quality. The Court rejected the defense’s claim that segregation violated the Fourteenth Amendment; while Homer Plessy’s attorney argued that the Constitution outlawed the use of race as a legal distinction, the judges ruled that claiming race did not exist was unreasonable.

³⁸ Bellamy, Equality, 364-5.

Following the decision, supporters of de jure racial segregation published editorials praising the Supreme Court for ruling that equal rights did not mean “community of rights.” The existence of common and equal rights would result in the abolition of private property, wrote one person in the New Orleans Times-Picayune. Outlawing segregation would be “absolute socialism.” This was by no means the opinion of the entire nation, as other newspapers such as the New York Tribune demonstrated, but attention that the case attracted to the issue of race may have given Bellamy pause in his own writing; promoting his own version of socialism was tiring enough without addressing so controversial an issue. Despite his seeming acceptance of the idea of “separate but equal” in the passage quoted above, however, the construction of the sentences implies that Bellamy believed a society free of racial prejudice could be achieved. When Dr. Leete talks about segregation in the “new system” he uses the past rather than present tense, suggesting that while the industrial army may have originally been structured that way, society could have since outgrown its prejudices.³⁹

A social issue that Bellamy was more comfortable discussing openly was women’s rights—a subject to which he devoted several chapters of Equality. According to Bellamy, the only way to provide women with rights completely equal to those of men was to reform the economic system. As he explained

³⁹ “Circumstances alter cases,” Articles Written by Edward Bellamy in the Springfield Union, Paul Bellamy Papers; Thomas J. Davis, “Race, Identity, and the Law: Plessy v. Ferguson,” Race on Trial: Law and Justice in American History, ed. Annette Gordon-Reed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 68, 70-1; New Orleans Times-Picayune quoted in Davis, 73.

through Dr. Leete: “The secret of the sexual bondage and of the industrial bondage was the same—namely, the unequal distribution of the wealth power, and the change which was necessary to put an end to both forms of bondage must obviously be economic equalization, which in the sexual as in the industrial relation would at once insure the substitution of co-operation for coercion.”

Notably, women’s roles in the industrial army seem to have changed between Looking Backward and Equality. Where in the former women work at occupations most suited to their gender, women in the latter can serve as “machinists, farmers, engineers, carpenters, iron workers, builders, engine drivers, or members of the other great crafts.” Bellamy’s slight alteration in the composition of his workforce coincides with the gradually changing roles of his female contemporaries. Between 1890 and 1900, the percentage of women with some form of employment outside the home rose from 18.9 to 20.6, and many more women were going to work, regardless of their marital status. Further, advances in technology brought new employment opportunities toward the end of the nineteenth century, making many occupations more suitable for women. As the nature of women’s work changed, Bellamy perhaps found it easier to reconcile female employment outside the home with the traditional female role of raising a family, thus making adjustments to his economic system in Equality.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Bellamy, Equality, 43, 133; Table 5.3 in S. J. Kleinberg, Women in the United States, 1830-1945 (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999) 109; Alice Kessler-Harris, Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 143.

While Bellamy's views on equality for women were changing, so were his contemporaries'. In the 1890s, women in rural areas became more politically active, publicly endorsing Populists even though the party was much less interested in temperance, suffrage, and other women's issues than the Grange movement had been. Women still demanded suffrage as the nineteenth century came to a close, but their reasons for doing so had changed. No longer was their primary argument that women deserved the same rights as men; instead, suffragists declared that the roles they held as mothers and housekeepers would add an important perspective to politics and give them the opportunity to vote on issues such as temperance and education. Suffragists also tended to be middle class women and unemployed; working class women often believed that women's lack of skills were more of a hindrance to receiving higher wages than their lack of voting rights. Bellamy's larger revolution may have been moving into the coherent period, but the movement for women's equality seemed to be regressing.⁴¹

The decline of Nationalism in 1894—precipitated by the demise of its newspaper—and the fusion of the People's Party with the Democrats in 1896 contributed to the end of any chance Bellamy had of witnessing drastic reform. Although Populism had been gaining ground in the South and West since 1892, it was unable to attract voters in the more industrialized and urban sections of the East; the confusing 1896 presidential election (in which William Jennings Bryan

⁴¹ Kleinberg, 182, 196; Kazin, 39-40; Kessler, 95-6.

was both the Democrats' and Populists' nominee and ran with either Arthur Sewell or Thomas Watson, depending on which party one was voting for) did not help matters. Because Bryan was unable to appeal to city residents and industrial workers, William McKinley won the election, marking the resumption of Republican dominance in American government. The defeat was a major disappointment for the populist cause, but Bellamy was perhaps still hopeful that the publication of Equality in 1897 would inspire another reform movement.⁴²

Bellamy died less than a year after Equality's publication. Sick with tuberculosis and described as a "nervous and physical wreck" in an article published in the New York Times, he traveled to Denver, Colorado, with his family in the fall of 1897 in hopes of restoring his health. Unable to recover, he returned home in April of 1898 and died on May 22. Despite his illness, in the months leading up to his death he still devoted himself to his work; following the publication of Equality, he had started selecting stories to be included in The Blindman's World, prepared to publish several new stories, and sought to revive the New Nation. In his final years, Bellamy had also begun planning a new novel, which he foresaw as being his greatest work.⁴³

Like the Nationalist movement or the great Revolution, the writer's life can be divided into two periods: before Looking Backward, and after. The second phase is the better known, but it was the development of ideas during the first

⁴² Lipow, 31; Kazin, 42-3; McMath, 203-5.

⁴³ "Edward Bellamy Very Ill," New York Times, September 21, 1897; Bowman, 147-8, 152.

phase that made the success of Looking Backward possible. The growth of capitalism in Bellamy's hometown of Chicopee Falls illustrated in microcosm what was occurring across the country, and it disconcerted him. Starting with "The Cold Snap" and progressing to The Duke of Stockbridge, he began demonstrating through his fiction the importance of restoring senses of social responsibility and close community to what was becoming an increasingly stratified and self-centered society, working out his ideas on politics and the economy in the pages of the Springfield Union all the while. As the isolated strikes of the early 1870s gave way to organized labor movements on a much larger scale, the writer recognized a growing need for the values he described in The Duke of Stockbridge to be applied on a national level, thus creating Looking Backward and the subsequent Nationalist movement. Striving to lead a purposeful life, as his mother had encouraged, Bellamy truly "looked backward to go forward," gradually expanding on the narrow experiences and ideas from his past to develop his plan for a national utopian society of the future.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Frank Lloyd Wright to Sylvia Bowman, September 11, 1957, Sylvia E. Bowman Collection, Edward Bellamy Memorial Association, Chicopee, Massachusetts.

EPILOGUE

Some one has said that when Edward Bellamy began “Looking Backward” he thought of it as a dream; when he had finished, he believed that it was a dream that might be realized. It is a mistake to suppose that Mr. Bellamy’s mission was in no wise accomplished. If he had done nothing else, he taught thinking men better respect for the principles of Socialism, which before his time were generally regarded on par with those of the Anarchist and of the Communist.

So began a memorial of the late author that ran in the New York Times six days after his death. If Looking Backward were in fact a dream, then it was a recurring dream that he had been having since adolescence; as his surviving early writings demonstrate, he was interested in social issues such as education, and more political questions like the role of government and people’s rightful places in it. While movements such as populism, strikes, and the suffrage movement helped reshape his thinking on specific issues in later years, Bellamy does not seem to have ever lost sight of the idea that a government should work in the best interests of all the people it represents, or that a country’s citizens should be educated well enough to make responsible, informed decisions. Motivated by the values instilled by his parents and the changes that he observed taking place all around him, he strove to convince readers that preserving the capitalist system was not in

their best interests, and that his dream of nationalized industry and an egalitarian society was worth investing in.¹

Bellamy's memory lived on into the twentieth century primarily because of the efforts of Emma Bellamy and Marion Bellamy Earnshaw (Edward's wife and daughter) and a few ardent followers. The two women went on speaking tours and wrote articles in support of his ideas, and Mrs. Bellamy even traveled to Washington, D.C., in 1935 to testify before Congress in support of a proposed piece of New Deal legislation. The Lundeen Bill, sponsored by Representative Ernest Lundeen of Minnesota, called for "an extensive system of unemployment, old-age and social insurance, including compensation for unemployed workers at the prevailing wage rate, and benefits for sickness, maternity, industrial injury, or any other disability."

Had the bill passed, it would have extended benefits to all workers, regardless of industry, age, race, or other social distinctions. The plan was essentially a redistribution of wealth, with funds coming from the government and taxes on inheritances, gifts, and income over \$5,000. Emma's words in support of the bill were very much her husband's; testifying before a subcommittee of the House Labor Committee, she said, "We are insulting the unhappy army of men and women whose birthright is equality, liberty and happiness. Only by insuring

¹ "The Late Edward Bellamy," New York Times, May 28, 1898.

the citizens of our land an adequate scale of living can we hope as a nation for any real progress or prosperity.”²

The global depression of the 1930s inspired a revival of interest in Bellamy’s ideas internationally as well as in the United States. In Canada, for example, socialists distributed copies of Looking Backward as propaganda to convince people that a better economic system—although not necessarily Bellamy’s—was possible. New Zealanders became interested in both Looking Backward and Equality after the government added “The Parable of the Water Tank,” a reprint of a chapter from Equality, to its list of banned literature. Back in the United States, Bellamy clubs reappeared, a Hollywood film agency tried to raise money for a movie version of Looking Backward, and Upton Sinclair, an admirer of Bellamy’s work, proposed a “production for use” program in his failed campaign for the governorship of California. As people tried to solve the problems of the global economy, the writer’s utopian novels seemed relevant again.³

Looking back, Bellamy would most certainly have been gratified that his literature had such a far-reaching effect both in America and around the world. Sincerely believing in the success of nonviolent change, he once remarked that

² Morgan, 72; “Bellamy’s Widow to Testify Today,” Springfield Republican, February 13, 1935; Jill S. Quadagno, “Welfare Capitalism and the Social Security Act of 1935,” American Sociological Review 49, no. 5 (October 1984): 638, in JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2095421> (accessed April 8, 2009); “Widow of Noted Writer Backs Job Surety,” Washington Times, February 14, 1935.

³ Sylvia Bowman, Edward Bellamy Abroad (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1962) 150, 238-9, 241.

writers had the power to “create...and direct” popular opinion, if only they would give up their “aesthetic fads [,] love stories, triolets and such embroidery work in ink.” A journalist, novelist, father, and historian, Bellamy was also an educator who directly and indirectly influenced thousands with his allegories, parables, and nonfiction work.⁴

⁴ Edward Bellamy, “[Letter to Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson],” Selected Writings on Religion and Society, ed. Joseph Schiffman (New York: The Liberal Arts Press, 1955) 139.

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