

CHAPTER II

THE FUNDAMENTAL IDEA OF SOCIALISM

The fundamental idea upon which Socialism rests is the same fundamental idea as that upon which all real scientific work is carried on. It is the denial that chance impulse and individual will and happening constitute the only possible methods by which things may be done in the world. It is an assertion that things are in their nature orderly, that things may be computed, may be calculated upon and foreseen. In the spirit of this belief Science aims at a systematic knowledge of material things. "Knowledge is power," knowledge that is frankly and truly exchanged--that is the primary assumption of the New Atlantis which created the Royal Society and the organization of research. The Socialist has just that same faith in the order, the knowableness of things and the power of men in co-operation to overcome chance; but to him, dealing as he does with the social affairs of men, it takes the form not of schemes for collective research but for collective action and the creation of a comprehensive design for all the social activities of man. While Science gathers knowledge, Socialism in an entirely harmonious spirit criticizes and develops a general plan of social life. Each seeks to replace disorder by order.

Each of these systems of ideas has, of course, its limits; we know in matters of material science that no calculated quantity is ever exact, no outline without a fogging at the edge, no angle without a curve at the apex; and in social affairs also, there must needs always be individuality and the unexpected and incalculable. But these things do not vitiate the case for a general order, any more than the different sizes and widths and needs of the human beings who travel prevent our having our railway carriages and seats and doors of a generally convenient size, nor our sending everybody over the same gauge of rail.

Now Science has not only this in common with Socialism that it has grown out of men's courageous confidence in the superiority of order to muddle, but these two great processes of human thought are further in sympathy in the demand they make upon men to become less egotistical and isolated. The main difference of modern scientific research from that of the middle ages, the secret of its immense successes, lies in its collective character, in the fact that every fruitful experiment is published, every new discovery of relationships explained. In a sense scientific research is a triumph over natural instinct, over that mean instinct that makes men secretive, that makes a man keep knowledge to himself and use it slyly to his own advantage. The training of a scientific man is a training in what an illiterate lout would despise as a weakness; it is a training in blabbing, in blurting things out, in telling just as plainly as possible and as soon as possible what it is he has found. To "keep shut" and

bright-eyed and to score advantages, that is the wisdom of the common stuff of humanity still. To science it is a crime. The noble practice of that noble profession medicine, for example, is to condemn as a quack and a rascal every man who uses secret remedies. And it is one of the most encouraging things for all who speculate upon human possibility to consider the multitude of men in the last three centuries who have been content to live laborious, unprofitable, and for the most part quite undistinguished lives in the service of knowledge that has transformed the world. Some names indeed stand out by virtue of gigantic or significant achievement, such names as Bacon, Newton, Volta, Darwin, Faraday, Joule; but these are but the culminating peaks of a nearly limitless Oberland of devoted toiling men, men one could list by the thousand. The rest have had the smallest meed of fame, small reward, much toil, much abandonment, of pleasure for their lot. One thing ennobles them all in common--their conquest over the meanness of concealment, their systematic application of energy to other than personal ends!

And that, too, Socialism pre-eminently demands. It applies to social and economic relationships the same high rule of frankness and veracity, the same subordination of purely personal considerations to a common end that Science demands in the field of thought and knowledge. Just as Science aims at a common organized body of knowledge to which all its servants contribute and in which they share, so Socialism insists upon its ideal of an organized social order which every man serves and by which every man benefits. Their

common enemy is the secret-thinking, self-seeking man. Secrecy, subterfuge and the private gain; these are the enemies of Socialism and the adversaries of Science. At times, I will admit, both Socialist and scientific man forget this essential sympathy. You will find specialized scientific investigators who do not realize they are, in effect, Socialists, and Socialists so dull to the quality of their own professions, that they gird against Science, and are secretive in policy. But such purblind servants of the light cannot alter the essential correlation of the two systems of ideas.

Now the Socialist, inspired by this conception of a possible frank and comprehensive social order to which mean and narrow ends must be sacrificed, attacks and criticizes the existing order of things at a great number of points and in a great variety of phraseology. At all points, however, you will find upon analysis that his criticism amounts to a declaration that there is wanting a sufficiency of CONSTRUCTIVE DESIGN. That in the last resort is what he always comes to.

He wants a complete organization for all those human affairs that are of collective importance. He says, to take instances almost haphazard, that our ways of manufacturing a great multitude of necessary things, of getting and distributing food, of conducting all sorts of business, of begetting and rearing children, of permitting diseases to engender and spread are chaotic and undisciplined, so badly done that here is enormous hardship, and there enormous waste, here excess and

degeneration, and there privation and death. He declares that for these collective purposes, in the satisfaction of these universal needs, mankind presents the appearance and follows the methods of a mob when it ought to follow the method of an army. In place of disorderly individual effort, each man doing what he pleases, the Socialist wants organized effort and a plan. And while the scientific man seeks to make an orderly map of the half-explored wilderness of fact, the Socialist seeks to make an orderly plan for the half-conceived wilderness of human effort.

That and no other is the essential Socialist idea.

But do not let this image mislead you. When the Socialist speaks of a plan, he knows clearly that it is impossible to make a plan as an architect makes a plan, because while the architect deals with dead stone and timber, the statesman and Socialist deal with living and striving things. But he seeks to make a plan as one designs and lays out a garden, so that sweet and seemly things may grow, wide and beautiful vistas open and weeds and foulness disappear. Always a garden plan develops and renews itself and discovers new possibilities, but what makes all its graciousness and beauty possible is the scheme and the persistent intention, the watching and the waiting, the digging and burning, the weeder clips and the hoe. That is the sort of plan, a living plan for things that live and grow, that the Socialist seeks for social and national life.

To make all this distincter I will show the planlessness of certain contemporary things, of two main sets of human interests in fact, and explain what inferences a Socialist draws in these matters. You will then see exactly what is meant when we deny that this present state of affairs has any constructive plan, and you will appreciate in the most generalized form the nature of the constructive plan which Socialists are making and offering the world.