

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SECOND MAIN GENERALIZATION OF SOCIALISM

#### § 1.

We have considered the Socialist criticism of the present state of affairs in relation to the most important of all public questions, the question of the welfare and upbringing of the next generation. We have stated the general principle of social reconstruction that emerges from that criticism. We have now to enter upon the question of ways and means, the economic question. We have to ask whether the vision we have conjured up of a whole population well fed, well clad, well educated--in a word, well brought-up--is, after all, only an amiable dream. Is it true that humanity is producing all that it can produce at the present time, and managing everything about as well as it can be managed; that, as a matter of fact, there isn't enough of food and care to go round, and hence the unavoidable anxiety in the life of every one (except in the case of a small minority of exceptionally secure people), and the absolute wretchedness of vast myriads of the poorer sort?

The Socialist says, No! He asserts that our economic system is as chaotic and wasteful as our system of rearing children--is only another aspect of the same planlessness--that it does its work with a

needless excess of friction, that it might be far simpler and almost infinitely more productive than it is.

Let us detach ourselves a little from our everyday habits of thinking in these matters; let us cease to take customary things for granted, and let us try and consider how our economic arrangements would strike a disinterested intelligence that looked at them freshly for the first time. Let us take some matter of primary economic importance, such as the housing of the population, and do our best to criticize it in this spirit of personal aloofness.

In order to do that, let us try to detach ourselves a little from our own personal interest in these affairs. Imagine a mind ignorant of our history and traditions, coming from some other sphere, from some world more civilized, from some other planet perhaps, to this earth. Would our system of housing strike it as the very wisest and most practical possible, would it really seem to be the attainable maximum of outcome for human exertion, or would it seem confused, disorderly, wasteful and bad? The Socialist holds that the latter would certainly be the verdict of such an impartial examination.

What would our visitor find in such a country as England, for example? He would find a few thousand people housed with conspicuous comfort and sumptuousness, in large, airy and often extremely beautiful homes equipped with every convenience--except such as economize labour--and waited on by many thousands of attendants. He would find next, several

hundreds of thousands in houses reasonably well built, but for the most part ill designed and unpleasant to the eye, houses passably sanitary and convenient, fitted with bathrooms, with properly equipped kitchens, usually with a certain space of air and garden about them. And the rest of our millions he would find crowded into houses evidently too small for a decent life, and often dreadfully dirty and insanitary, without proper space or appliances to cook properly, wash properly or indeed perform any of the fundamental operations of a civilized life tolerably well--without, indeed, even the privacy needed for common decency. In the towns he would find most of the houses occupied by people for whose needs they were obviously not designed, and in many cases extraordinarily crowded, ramshackle and unclean; in the country he would be amazed to find still denser congestion, sometimes a dozen people in one miserable, tumble-down, outwardly picturesque and inwardly abominable two-roomed cottage, people living up against pigsties and drawing water from wells they could not help but contaminate. Think of how the intimate glimpses from the railway train one gets into people's homes upon the outskirts of any of our large towns would impress him. And being, as we assume, clear minded and able to trace cause and effect, he would see all this disorder working out in mortality, disease, misery and intellectual and moral failure.

All this would strike our visitor as a very remarkable state of affairs for reasonable creatures to endure, and probably he would not understand at first that millions of people were content to regard all

this disorder as the permanent lot of humanity. He would assume that this must be a temporary state of affairs due to some causes unknown to him, some great migration, for example. He would suppose we were all busy putting things right. He would see on the one hand unemployed labour and unemployed material; on the other, great areas of suitable land and the crying need for more and better homes than the people had, and it would seem the most natural thing in the world that the directing intelligence of the community should set the unemployed people to work with the unemployed material upon the land to house the whole population fairly and well. There exists all that is needed to house the whole population admirably, the building material, the room, the unoccupied hands. Why is it not being done?

Our answer would be, of course, that he did not understand our difficulties; the land was not ours to do as we liked with, it did not belong to the community but to certain persons, the Owners, who either refused to let us build upon it or buy it or have anything to do with it, or demanded money we could not produce for it; that equally the material was not ours, but belonged to certain other Owners, and that, thirdly, the community had insufficient money or credit to pay the wages and maintenance and equipment of the workers who starved and degenerated in our streets--for that money, too, was privately owned.

This would puzzle our visitor considerably.

"Why do you have Owners?" he would ask.

We might find that difficult to answer.

"But why do you let the land be owned?" he would go on. "You don't let people own the air. And these bricks and timber you mustn't touch, the mortar you need and the gold you need--they all came out of the ground--they all belonged to everybody or nobody a little while ago!"

You would say something indistinct about Property.

"But why?"

"Somebody must own the things."

"Well, let the State own the things and use them for the common good.

It owns the roads, it owns the foreshores and the territorial

seas--nobody owns the air!"

If you entered upon historical explanations with him, you would soon be in difficulties. You would find that so recently as the Feudal System--which was still living, so to speak, yesterday--the King, who stood for the State, held the land as the Realm, and the predecessors of the present owners held under him merely as the administrative officials who performed all sorts of public services and had all sorts of privileges thereby. They have dropped the services and stuck to the land and the privileges; that is all.

"I begin to perceive," our visitor would say as this became clear; "your world is under the spell of an exaggerated idea, this preposterous idea there must be an individual Owner for everything in the world. Obviously you can't get on while you are under the spell of that! So long as you have this private ownership in everything, there's no help for you. You cut up your land and material in parcels of all sorts and sizes among this multitude of irresponsible little monarchs; you let all the material you need get distributed among another small swarm of Owners, and clearly you can only get them to work for public ends in the most roundabout, tedious and wasteful way. Why should they? They're very well satisfied as they are! But if the community as a whole insisted that this idea of private Ownership you have in regard to land and natural things was all nonsense--and it is all nonsense!--just think what you might not do with it now that you have all the new powers and lights that Science has given you. You might turn all your towns into garden cities, put an end to overcrowding, abolish smoky skies----"

"Hush!" I should have to interrupt; "if you talk of the things that are clearly possible in the world to-day, they will say you are an Utopian dreamer!"

But at least one thing would have become clear, the little swarm of Owners and their claims standing in the way of any bold collective dealing with housing or any such public concern. The real work to be

done here is to change an idea, that idea of ownership, to so modify it that it will cease to obstruct the rational development of life; and that is what the Socialist seeks to do.

§ 2.

Now the argument that the civilized housing of the masses of our population now is impossible because if you set out to do it you come up against the veto of the private owner at every stage, can be applied to almost every general public service. Some little while ago I wrote a tract for the Fabian Society about Boots;<sup>[3]</sup> and I will not apologize for repeating here a passage from that. To begin with, this tract pointed out the badness, unhealthiness and discomfort of people's footwear as one saw it in every poor quarter, and asked why it was that things were in so disagreeable a state. There was plenty of leather in the world, plenty of labour.

[3] This Misery of Boots. It is intended as an introductory tract explaining the central idea of Socialism for propaganda purposes, and it is published by the Fabian Society, of 3 Clement's Inn, London, at 3d. That, together with my tract Socialism and the Family (A. C. Fifield, 44 Fleet Street, London, 6d.), gives the whole broad outline of the Socialist attitude.

"Here on the one hand--you can see for yourself in any unfashionable part of Great Britain--are people badly, uncomfortably, painfully shod in old boots, rotten boots, sham boots; and on the other great stretches of land in the world, with unlimited possibilities of cattle and leather and great numbers of people who, either through wealth or trade disorder, are doing no work. And our question is: 'Why cannot the latter set to work and make and distribute boots?'

"Imagine yourself trying to organize something of this kind of Free Booting expedition and consider the difficulties you would meet with. You would begin by looking for a lot of leather. Imagine yourself setting off to South America, for example, to get leather; beginning at the very beginning by setting to work to kill and flay a herd of cattle. You find at once you are interrupted. Along comes your first obstacle in the shape of a man who tells you the cattle and the leather belong to him. You explain that the leather is wanted for people who have no decent boots in England. He says he does not care a rap what you want it for; before you may take it from him you have to buy him off; it is his private property, this leather, and the herd and the land over which the herd ranges. You ask him how much he wants for his leather, and he tells you frankly, just as much as he can induce you to give.

"If he chanced to be a person of exceptional sweetness of

disposition, you might perhaps argue with him. You might point out to him that this project of giving people splendid boots was a fine one that would put an end to much human misery. He might even sympathize with your generous enthusiasm, but you would, I think, find him adamant in his resolve to get just as much out of you for his leather as you could with the utmost effort pay.

"Suppose, now, you said to him: 'But how did you come by this land and these herds so that you can stand between them and the people who have need of them, exacting this profit?' He would probably either embark upon a long rigmarole, or, what is much more probable, lose his temper and decline to argue. Pursuing your doubt as to the rightfulness of his property in these things, you might admit he deserved a certain reasonable fee for the rough care he had taken of the land and herds. But cattle breeders are a rude violent race, and it is doubtful if you would get far beyond your proposition of a reasonable fee. You would, in fact, have to buy off this owner of the leather at a good thumping price--he exacting just as much as he could get from you--if you wanted to go on with your project.

"Well, then you would have to get your leather here, and to do that you would have to bring it by railway and ship to this country. And here again you would find people without any desire or intention of helping your project, standing in your

course resolved to make every possible penny out of you on your way to provide sound boots for every one. You would find the railway was private property and had an owner or owners; you would find the ship was private property with an owner or owners, and that none of these would be satisfied for a moment with a mere fee adequate to their services. They too would be resolved to make every penny of profit out of you. If you made inquiries about the matter, you would probably find the real owners of railway and ship were companies of shareholders, and the profit squeezed out of your poor people's boots at this stage went to fill the pockets of old ladies, at Torquay, spendthrifts in Paris, well-booted gentlemen in London clubs, all sorts of glossy people....

"Well, you get the leather to England at last; and now you want to make it into boots. You take it to a centre of population, invite workers to come to you, erect sheds and machinery upon a vacant piece of ground, and start off in a sort of fury of generous industry, boot-making.... Do you? There comes along an owner for that vacant piece of ground, declares it is his property, demands an enormous sum for rent. And your workers all round you, you find, cannot get house room until they too have paid rent--every inch of the country is somebody's property, and a man may not shut his eyes for an hour without the consent of some owner or other. And the food your shoe-makers eat, the clothes they wear, have all paid

tribute and profit to land-owners, cart-owners, house-owners, endless tribute over and above the fair pay for work that has been done upon them....

"So one might go on. But you begin to see now one set of reasons at least why every one has not good comfortable boots. There could be plenty of leather; and there is certainly plenty of labour and quite enough intelligence in the world to manage that and a thousand other desirable things. But this institution of Private Property in land and naturally produced things, these obstructive claims that prevent you using ground, or moving material, and that have to be bought out at exorbitant prices, stand in the way. All these owners hang like parasites upon your enterprise at its every stage; and by the time you get your sound boots well made in England, you will find them costing about a pound a pair--high out of reach of the general mass of people. And you will perhaps not think me fanciful and extravagant when I confess that when I realize this and look at poor people's boots in the street, and see them cracked and misshapen and altogether nasty, I seem to see also a lot of little phantom land-owners, cattle-owners, house-owners, owners of all sorts, swarming over their pinched and weary feet like leeches, taking much and giving nothing and being the real cause of all such miseries."

§ 3.

Our visitor would not only be struck by the clogging of our social activities through this system of leaving everything to private enterprise; he would also be struck by the immense wastefulness. Everywhere he would see things in duplicate and triplicate; down the High Street of any small town he would find three or four butchers--mostly selling New Zealand mutton and Argentine beef as English--five or six grocers, three or four milk shops, one or two big drapers and three or four small haberdashers, milliners, and "fancy shops," two or three fishmongers, all very poor, all rather bad, most of them in debt and with their assistants all insecure and underpaid. He would find in spite of this wealth of competition that every one who could contrive it, all the really prosperous people in fact, bought most of their food and drapery from big London firms.

But why should I go on writing fresh arguments when we have Elihu's classic tract<sup>[4]</sup> to quote.

[4] Elihu's tracts are published by the Independent Labour Party at one penny each. The best are: Whose Dog Art Thou? A Nation of Slaves; Milk and Postage Stamps; A Corner in Flesh and Blood; and Simple Division.

"Observe how private enterprise supplies the streets with milk. At 7.30 a milk cart comes lumbering along and delivers

milk at one house and away again. Half-an-hour later another milk cart arrives and delivers milk, first on this side of the street and then on that, until seven houses have been supplied, and then he departs. During the next three or four hours four other milk carts put in an appearance at varying intervals, supplying a house here and another there, until finally, as it draws towards noon, their task is accomplished and the street supplied with milk.

"The time actually occupied by one and another of these distributors of milk makes in all about an hour and forty minutes, six men and six horses and carts being required for the purpose, and these equipages rattle along one after the other, all over the district, through the greater part of the day, in the same erratic and extraordinary manner."

§ 4.

Our imaginary visitor would probably quite fail to grasp the reasons why we do not forthwith shake off this obstructive and harmful idea of Private Ownership, dispossess our Landowners and so forth as gently as possible, and set to work upon collective housing and the rest of it. And so he would "exit wondering."

But that would be only the opening of the real argument. A competent

Anti-Socialist of a more terrestrial experience would have a great many very effectual and very sound considerations to advance in defence of the present system.

He might urge that our present way of doing things, though it was sometimes almost as wasteful as Nature when fresh spawn or pollen germs are scattered, was in many ways singularly congenial to the infirmities of humanity. The idea of property is a spontaneous product of the mortal mind; children develop it in the nursery, and are passionately alive to the difference of meum and tuum, and its extension to land, subterranean products and wild free things, even if it is under analysis a little unreasonable, was at least singularly acceptable to humanity.

And there would be admirable soundness in all this. There can be little or no doubt that the conception of personal ownership has in the past contributed elements to human progress that could have come through no other means. It has allowed private individuals in odd corners to try experiments in new methods and new appliances, that the general intelligence, such as it was, of the community could not have understood. For all its faults, our present individualistic order compared not simply with the communism of primitive tribes, but even with the personal and largely illiterate control of the mediæval feudal governments, is a good efficient working method. I don't think a Socialist need quarrel with the facts of history or human nature. But he would urge that Private Ownership is only a phase, though no

doubt quite a necessary phase, in human development. The world has needed Private Ownership just as (Lester F. Ward declares[5]) it once needed slavery to discipline men and women to agriculture and habits of industry, and just as it needed autocratic kings to weld warring tribes into nations and nations into empires, to build high roads, end private war and establish the idea of Law, and a wider than tribal loyalty. But just as Western Europe has passed out of the phases of slavery and of autocracy (which is national slavery) into constitutionalism, so, he would hold, we are passing out of the phase of private ownership of land and material and food. We are doing so not because we reject it, but because we have worked it out, because we have learnt its lessons and can now go on to a higher and finer organization.

[5] Pure Sociology, p. 271-2, by Lester F. Ward. (The Macmillan Company, New York.)

There the Anti-Socialist would join issue with a lesser advantage. He would have to show not only that Private Ownership has been serviceable and justifiable in the past--which many Socialists admit quite cheerfully--but that it is the crown and perfection of human methods, which the Socialists flatly deny. Universal Private Ownership, an extreme development of the sentiment of individual autonomy and the limitation of the State to the merest police functions, were a necessary outcome of the breakdown of the unprogressive authoritative Feudal System in alliance with a dogmatic

Church. It reached its maximum in the eighteenth century, when even some of the prisons and workhouses were run by private contract, when people issued a private money, the old token coinage, and even regiments of soldiers were raised by private enterprise. It was, the Socialist alleges, a mere phase of that breaking up of the old social edifice, a weakening of the old circle of ideas that had to precede the new constructive effort. But with land, with all sorts of property and all sorts of businesses and public services, just as with the old isolated private family, the old separateness and independence is giving way to a new synthesis. The idea of Private Ownership, albeit still the ruling idea of our civilization, does not rule nearly so absolutely as it did. It weakens and falters before the inexorable demands of social necessity--manifestly under our eyes.

The Socialist would be able to appeal to a far greater number of laws in the nature of limitation of the owner of property than could be quoted to show the limitation of the old supremacy of the head of the family. In the first place he would be able to point to a constantly increasing interference with the right of the landowner to do what he liked with his own, building regulations, intervention to create allotments and so forth. Then there would be a vast mass of factory and industrial legislation, controlling, directing, prohibiting; fencing machinery, interfering on behalf of health, justice and public necessity with the owner's free bargain with his work-people. His business undertakings would be under limitations his grandfather never knew--even harmless adulterations that merely intensify profit,

forbidden him!

And in the next place and still more significant is the manifest determination to keep in public hands many things that would once inevitably have become private property. For example, in the middle Victorian period a water supply, a gas supply, a railway or tramway was inevitably a private enterprise, the creation of a new property; now, this is the exception rather than the rule. While gas and water and trains were supplied by speculative owners for profit, electric light and power, new tramways and light railways are created in an increasing number of cases by public bodies who retain them for the public good. Nobody who travels to London as I do regularly in the dirty, over-crowded carriages of the infrequent and unpunctual trains of the South-Eastern Company, and who then transfers to the cleanly, speedy, frequent--in a word, "civilized" electric cars of the London County Council, can fail to estimate the value and significance of this supersession of the private owner by the common-weal.

All these things, the Socialists insist, are but a beginning. They point to a new phase in social development, to the appearance of a collective intelligence and a sense of public service taking over appliances, powers, enterprises, with a growing confidence that must end finally in the substitution of collective for private ownership and enterprise throughout the whole area of the common business of life.

§ 5.

In relation to quite a number of large public services it can be shown that even under contemporary conditions Private Ownership does work with an enormous waste and inefficiency. Necessarily it seeks for profit; necessarily it seeks to do as little as possible for as much as possible. The prosperity of all Kent is crippled by a "combine" of two ill-managed and unenterprising railway companies, with no funds for new developments, grinding out an uncertain dividend by clipping expenditure.

I happen to see this organization pretty closely, and I can imagine no State enterprise west of Turkey or Persia presenting even to the passing eye so deplorable a spectacle of ruin and inefficiency. The South-Eastern Company's estate at Seabrook presents the dreariest spectacle of incompetent development conceivable; one can see its failure three miles away; it is a waste with an embryo slum in one corner protected by an extravagant sea-wall, already partly shattered, from the sea.

To-day (Nov. 4, 1907) the price of the ordinary South-Eastern stock is 65 and its deferred stock 31; of the London, Chatham and Dover ordinary stock 10-1/2; an eloquent testimony to the disheartened state of the owners who now cling reluctantly to this disappointing monopoly. Spite of this impoverishment of the ordinary shareholder,

this railway system has evidently paid too much profit in the past for efficiency; the rolling stock is old and ageing--much of it is by modern standards abominable--the trains are infrequent, and the shunting operations at local stations, with insufficient sidings and insufficient staffs, produce a chronic dislocation and unpunctuality in the traffic that is exaggerated by the defects of direction evident even in the very time-tables. The trains are not well planned, the connections with branch lines are often extremely ill managed. The service is bad to its details. It is the exception rather than the rule to find a ticket-office in the morning with change for a five-pound note; and, as a little indication of the spirit of the whole machine, I discovered the other day that the conductors upon the South-Eastern trams at Hythe start their morning with absolutely no change at all. Recently the roof of the station at Charing Cross fell in--through sheer decay.... A whole rich county now stagnates hopelessly under the grip of this sample of private enterprise, towns fail to grow, trade flows sluggishly from point to point. No population in the world would stand such a management as it endures at the hands of the South-Eastern Railway from any responsible public body. Out would go the whole board of managers at the next election. Consider what would have happened if the London County Council had owned Charing Cross Station three years ago. But manifestly there is nothing better to be done under private ownership conditions. The common shareholders are scattered and practically powerless, and their collective aim is, at any expense to the public welfare, to keep the price of the shares from going still lower.

The South-Eastern Railway is only one striking instance of the general unserviceableness of private ownership for public services. Nearly all the British railway companies, in greater or less degree, present now a similar degenerative process. Years of profit-sweating, of high dividends, have left them with old stations, old rolling stock, old staffs, bad habits and diminishing borrowing power. Only a few of these corporations make any attempt to keep pace with invention. It is remarkable now in an epoch of almost universal progress how stagnant the British privately owned railways are. One travels now-a-days if anything with a decrease of comfort from the 1880 accommodation, because of the greater overcrowding; and there has been no general increase of speed, no increase in smooth running, no increase in immunity from accident now for quite a number of years. One travels in a dingy box of a compartment that is too ill-lit at night for reading and full of invincible draughts. In winter the only warmth is too often an insufficient footwarmer of battered tin, for which the passengers fight fiercely with their feet. An observant person cannot fail to be struck--especially if he is returning from travel upon the State railways of Switzerland or Germany--by the shabby-looking porters on so many of our lines--they represent the standard of good clothing for the year 1848 or thereabouts--and by the bleak misery of many of the stations, the universal dirt that electricity might even now abolish. You dare not drop a parcel on any British railway cushion for fear of the cloud of horrible dust you would raise; you have to put it down softly. Consider, too, the congested infrequent suburban

trains that ply round any large centre of population, the inefficient goods and parcel distribution that hangs up the trade of the local shopman everywhere. Not only in the arrested standard of comfort, but in the efficiency of working also are our privately owned railways a hopeless discredit to private ownership.

None of them, hampered by their present equipment, are able to adapt themselves readily to the new and better mechanism science produces for them, electric traction, electric lighting and so forth; and it seems to me highly probable that the last steam-engines and the last oil lamps in the world will be found upon the southern railway lines of Great Britain. How can they go on borrowing new capital with their stock at the prices I have quoted, and how can they do anything without new capital? The conception of profit-raising that rules our railways takes rather an altogether different direction; it takes the form of attempts to procure a monopoly even of the minor traffic by resisting the development of light railways, and of keeping the standard of comfort, decency and cleanliness low. As for the vast social ameliorations that could be wrought now, and are urgently needed now, by redistributing population through enhanced and cheapened services scientifically planned, and by an efficient collection and carriage of horticultural and agricultural produce, these things lie outside the philosophy of the Private Owner altogether. They would probably not pay him, and there the matter ends; that they would pay the community enormously, does not for one moment enter into his circle of ideas.

There can be little doubt that in the next decade or so the secular decay and lagging of the British railway services which is inevitable under existing conditions (in speed, in comfort, they have long been distanced by continental lines), the probable increase in accidents due to economically administered permanent ways and ageing stations and bridges, and the ever more perceptible check to British economic development due to this clogging of the circulatory system, will be of immense value to the Socialist propaganda as an object lesson in private ownership. In Italy the thing has already passed its inevitable climax, and the State is now struggling valiantly to put a disorganized, ill-equipped and undisciplined network of railways, the legacy of a period of private enterprise, into tolerable working order.

## § 6.

In a second great public service there is a perceptible, a growing recognition of the evil and danger of allowing profit-seeking Private Ownership to prevail; and that is the general food supply. A great quickening of the public imagination in this matter has occurred through the "boom" of Mr. Upton Sinclair's book, *The Jungle*--a book every student of the elements of Socialism should read. He accumulated a considerable mass of facts about the Chicago stockyards, and incorporated them with his story, and so enabled people to realize

what they might with a little imaginative effort have inferred before; that the slaughtering of cattle and the preparation of meat, when it is done wholly and solely for profit, that is to say when it is done as rapidly and cheaply as possible, is done horribly; that it is a business cruel to the beasts, cruel to the workers and dangerous to the public health. The United States has long recognized the inadequacy of private consciences in this concern, and while all the vast profits of the business go to the meat packers, the community has maintained an insufficient supply of underpaid and, it is said in some cases, bribable inspectors to look after the public welfare.

In this country also, slaughtering is a private enterprise but slightly checked by inspection, and if we have no Chicago, we probably have all its mean savings, its dirt and carelessness and filth, scattered here and there all over the country, a little in this privately owned slaughter-house, a little in that. For what inducement has a butcher to spend money and time in making his slaughter-house decent, sanitary and humane above the standard of his fellows? To do that will only make him poor and insolvent. Anyhow, few of his customers will come to see their meat butchered, and, as they say in the South of England, "What the eye don't see the heart don't grieve."

Many witnesses concur in declaring that our common jam, pickle and preserve trade is carried on under equally filthy conditions. If it is not, it is a miracle, in view of the inducements the Private Owner has to cut his expenses, economize on premises and wages, and buy his

fruit as near decay and his sugar as near dirt as he can. The scandal of our milk supply is an open one; it is more and more evident that so long as Private Ownership rules the milk trade, we can never be sure that at every point in the course of the milk from cow to consumer there will not creep in harmful and dishonest profit-making elements. The milking is too often done dirtily from dirty cows and into dirty vessels--why should a business man fool away his profits in paying for scrupulous cleanliness when it is almost impossible to tell at sight whether milk is clean or dirty?--and there come more or less harmful dilutions and adulterations and exposures to infection at every handling, at every chance at profit making. The unavoidable inefficiency of the private milk trade reflects itself in infant mortality--we pay our national tribute to private enterprise in milk, a tribute of many thousands of babies every year. We try to reduce this tribute by inspection. But why should the State pay money for inspection, upon keeping highly-trained and competent persons merely to pry and persecute in order that private incompetent people should reap profits with something short of a maximum of child murder? It would be much simpler to set to work directly, employ and train these private persons, and run the dairies and milk distribution ourselves.

There is an equally strong case for a public handling of bakehouses and the bread supply. Already the public is put to great and entirely unremunerative expense in inspecting and checking weights and hunting down the grosser instances of adulteration, grubbiness and dirt, and with it all the common bakehouse remains for the most part a

subterranean haunt of rats, mice and cockroaches, and the ordinary baker's bread is so insipid and unnutritious that a great number of more prosperous people now-a-days find it advantageous to health and pocket alike to bake at home. A considerable amount of physical degeneration may be connected with the general poorness of our bread. The plain fact of the case is that our population will never get good wholesome bread from the Private Owner's bakehouse, until it employs one skilled official to watch every half-dozen bakers--and another to watch him; and it seems altogether saner and cheaper to abolish the Private Owner in this business also and do the job cleanly, honestly and straightforwardly in proper buildings with properly paid labour as a public concern.

Now, what has been said of the food supply is still truer of the trade in fuel. Between the consumer and the collier is a string of private persons each resolved to squeeze every penny of profit out of the coal on its way to the cheap and wasteful grate one finds in the jerry-built homes of the poor. In addition there is every winter now, whether in Great Britain or America, a manipulation of the coal market and a more or less severe coal famine. Coal is jerked up to unprecedented prices, and the small consumer, who has no place for storage, who must buy, if not from day to day, from week to week, finds he must draw upon his food fund and his savings to meet the Private Owner's raised demands--or freeze. Every such coal famine reaps its harvest for death of old people and young children, and wipes out so many thousands of savings' bank accounts and hoarded

shillings. Consider the essential imbecility of allowing the nation's life and the nation's thrift to be preyed upon for profit in this way! Is it possible to doubt that the civilized community of the future will have to resume possession of all its stores of fuel, will keep itself informed of the fluctuating needs of its population, and will distribute and sell coal, gas and oil--not for the maximum profit, but the maximum general welfare?[6]

[6] In Dakota, 1906-7, private enterprise led to a particularly severe coal famine in the bitterest weather, and the shortage was felt so severely that the population rose and attacked and stopped passing coal-trains.

Another great branch of trade in which Private Ownership and private freedom is manifestly antagonistic to the public welfare is the Drink Traffic. Here we have a commodity, essentially a drug, its use readily developing a vice, deleterious at its best, complex in composition, and particularly susceptible to adulteration and the enhancement of its attraction by poisonous ingredients and indeed to every sort of mischievous secret manipulation. Probably nothing is more rarely found pure and honest than beer or whisky; whisky begins to be blended and doctored before it leaves the distillery. And we allow the production and distribution of this drug of alcoholic drink to be from first to last a source of private profit. We so contrive it that we put money prizes upon the propaganda of drink. Is it any wonder that drink is not only made by adulteration far more evil than it naturally is, but

that it is forced upon the public in every possible way?

"He tempts them to drink," I have heard a clergyman say of his village publican. But what else did he think the publican was there for?--to preach total abstinence? Naturally, inevitably, the whole of the Trade is a propaganda--not of drunkenness, but of habitual heavy drinking. The more successful propagandists, the great brewers and distillers grow rich just in the proportion that people consume beer and spirits; they gain honour and peerages in the measure of their success.

It is very interesting to the Socialist to trace the long struggle of the temperance movement against its initial ideas of freedom, and to see how inevitably the most reluctant and unlikely people have been forced to recognize Private Ownership in this trade and for profit as the ultimate evil. I am delighted to have to hand an excellent little tract by "A Ratepayer": National Efficiency and the Drink Traffic. It has a preface by Mr. Haldane, and it is as satisfactory a demonstration of the absolute necessity of thoroughgoing Socialism in this particular field as any Socialist could wish. One encounters the Bishop of Chester, for example, in its pages talking the purest Socialism, and making the most luminous admissions of the impossibility of continued private control, in phrases that need but a few verbal changes to apply equally to milk, to meat, to bread, to housing, to book-selling[7]....

[7] For a clear and admirable account of the Socialist

attitude to the temperance question, see the tract on  
Municipal Drink Traffic published by the Fabian Society;  
price one penny.

§ 7.

Land and housing, railways, food, drink, coal, in each of these great general interests there is a separate strong case for the substitution of collective control for the Private Ownership methods of the present time. There is a great and growing number of people like "A Ratepayer" and Mr. Haldane, who do not call themselves Socialists but who are yet strongly tinged with Socialist conceptions; who are convinced--some in the case of the land, some in the case of the drink trade or the milk, that Private Ownership and working for profit must cease. But they will not admit a general principle, they argue each case on its merits.

The Socialist maintains that, albeit the details of each problem must be studied apart, there does underlie all these cases and the whole economic situation at the present time, one general fact, that through our whole social system from top to base we find things under the influence of a misleading idea that must be changed, and which, until it is changed, will continue to work out in waste, unserviceableness, cramped lives and suffering and death. Each man is for himself, that is this misleading idea, seeking, perforce, ends discordant with the

general welfare; who serves the community without exacting pay, goes under; who exacts pay without service prospers and continues; success is not to do well, it is to have and to get; failure is not to do ill, it is to lose and not have; and under these conditions how can we expect anything but dislocated, unsatisfying service at every turn?

The contemporary anti-Socialist moralist and the social satirist would appeal to the Owner's sense of duty; he would declare in a platitudinous tone that property had its duties as well as its rights, and so forth. The Socialist, however, looks a little deeper, and puts the thing differently. He brings both rights and duties to a keener scrutiny. What underlies all these social disorders, he alleges, is one simple thing, a misconception of property; an unreasonable exaggeration, an accumulated, inherited exaggeration, of the idea of property. He says the idea of private property, which is just and reasonable in relation to intimate personal things, to clothes, appliances, books, one's home or apartments, the garden one loves or the horse one rides, has become unreasonably exaggerated until it obsesses the world; that the freedom we have given men to claim and own and hold the land upon which we must live, the fuel we burn, the supplies of food and metal we require, the railways and ships upon which our business goes, and to fix what prices they like to exact for all these services, leads to the impoverishment and practical enslavement of the mass of mankind.

And so he comes to his second main generalization, which I may perhaps

set out in these words:--

The idea of the private ownership of things and the rights of owners is enormously and mischievously exaggerated in the contemporary world. The conception of private property has been extended to land, to material, to the values and resources accumulated by past generations, to a vast variety of things that are properly the inheritance of the whole race. As a result of this, there is much obstruction and waste of human energy and a huge loss of opportunity and freedom for the mass of mankind; progress is retarded, there is a vast amount of avoidable wretchedness, cruelty and injustice.

The Socialist holds that the community as a whole should be inalienably the owner and administrator of the land, of raw materials, of values and resources accumulated from the past, and that private property must be of a terminable nature, reverting to the community, and subject to the general welfare.

This is the second of the twin generalizations upon which the edifice of modern Socialism rests. Like the first, and like the practical side of all sound religious teaching, it is a specific application of one general rule of conduct, and that is the subordination of the individual motive to the happiness and welfare of the species.

§ 8.

But now the reader unaccustomed to Socialist discussion will begin to see the crude form of the answer to the question raised by the previous chapter; he will see the resources from which the enlargement of human life we there contemplated is to be derived, and realize the economic methods to be pursued. Collective ownership is the necessary corollary of collective responsibility. There are to be no private land owners, no private bankers and lenders of money, no private insurance adventurers, no private railway owners nor shipping owners, no private mine owners, oil kings, silver kings, coal and wheat forestallers or the like. All this realm of property is to be resumed by the State, is to be State-owned and State-managed, and the vast revenues that are now devoted to private ends will go steadily to feed, maintain and educate a new and better generation, to promote research and advance science, to build new houses, develop fresh resources, plant, plan, beautify and reconstruct the world.