

## CHAPTER VI

### WOULD SOCIALISM DESTROY THE HOME?

#### § 1.

For reasons that will become clearer when we tell something of the early history and development of Socialism, the Socialist propositions with regard to the family lie open to certain grave misconceptions. People are told--and told quite honestly and believingly--that Socialism will destroy the home, will substitute a sort of human stud farm for that warm and intimate nest of human life, will bring up our children in incubators and crèches and--Institutions generally.

But before we come to what modern Socialists do desire in these matters, it may be well to consider something of the present reality of the home people are so concerned about. The reader must not idealize. He must not shut his eyes to facts, dream, as Lord Hugh Cecil and Lord Robert Cecil--those admirable champions of a bad cause--probably do, of a beautiful world of homes, orderly, virtuous, each a little human fastness, each with its porch and creeper, each with its books and harmonium, its hymn-singing on Sunday night, its dear mother who makes such wonderful cakes, its strong and happy father--and then say, "These wicked Socialists want to destroy all this." Because, in the first place, such homes are being destroyed and

made impossible now by the very causes against which Socialism fights, and because in this world at the present time very few homes are at all like this ideal. In reality every poor home is haunted by the spectre of irregular employment and undermined by untrustworthy insurance, it must shelter in insanitary dwellings and its children eat adulterated food because none other can be got. And that, I am sorry to say, it is only too easy to prove, by a second appeal to a document of which I have already made use.

One hears at times still of the austere, virtuous, kindly, poor Scotch home, one has a vision of the "Cottar's Saturday night." "Perish all other dreams," one cries, "rather than that such goodness and simplicity should end." But now let us look at the average poor Scotch home, and compare it with our dream.

Here is the reality.

These entries come from the recently published Edinburgh Charity Organization Society's report upon the homes of about fourteen hundred school-children, that is to say, about eight hundred Scotch homes. Remember they are sample homes. They are, as I have already suggested by quoting authorities for London and York--and as any district visitor will recognize--little worse and little better than the bulk of poor people's homes in Scotland and England at the present time. I am just going to copy down--not a selection, mind--but a series of consecutive entries taken haphazard from this implacable

list. My last quotation was from cases 1, 2, 3 and so on; I've now thrust my fingers among the pages and come upon numbers 191 and 192, etc. Here they are, one after the other, just as they come in the list:--

"191. A widow and child lodging with a married son. Three grown-up people and three children occupy one room and bed-closet. The widow leads a wandering life, and is intemperate. The house is thoroughly bad and insanitary. The child is pallid and delicate looking, and receives little attention, for the mother is usually out working. He plays in the streets. Five children are dead. Boy has glands and is fleabitten. Evidence from Police, School Officer and Employer.

"192. A miserable home. Father dead. Mother and eldest son careless and indifferent. Of the five children, the two eldest are grown up. The elder girl is working, and she is of a better type and might do well under better circumstances; she looks overworked. The mother is supposed to char; she gets parish relief, and one child earns out of school hours. Four children are dead. The children at school are dirty and ragged. The mother could get work if she did not drink. The children at school get free dinners and clothing, and the family is favourably reported on by the Church. The second child impetigo; neck glands; body dirty. The third, glands; dirty and fleabitten. Housing: six in two small rooms.

Evidence from Parish Sister, Parish Council, School Charity, Police, Teacher, Children's Employment and School Officer.

"193. A widow, apparently respectable and well-doing, but may drink. She must in any case have a struggle to maintain her family, though she has much help from Parish, Church, etc. She works out. The children at school are fed, and altogether a large amount of charity must be received, as two Churches have interested themselves in the matter. Three children dead.

Housing: three in two tiny rooms. Evidence from Church, Parish Council, School Charity, Police, Parish Sister, Teacher, Insurance and Factor.

"194. The father drinks, and, to a certain extent, the mother; but the home is tidy and clean, and the rent is regularly paid. Indeed, there is no sign of poverty. There is a daughter who has got into trouble. Only two children out of nine are alive. The father comes from the country and seems intelligent enough, but he appears to have degenerated. They go to a mission, it is believed for what they can get from it.

Housing: four in two rooms. Evidence from Club, Church, Factor and Police.

"195. The husband is intemperate. The mother is quiet, but it is feared that she drinks also. She seems to have lost control of her little boy of seven. The parents married very young,

and the first child was born before the marriage. The man's work is not regular, and probably things are not improving with him. Still, the house is fairly comfortable, and they pay club money regularly, and have a good police report. One child has died. Housing: five in two rooms. Evidence from Parish Sister, Police, Club, Employer, School-mistress and Factor.

"196. A filthy, dirty house. The most elementary notions of cleanliness seem disregarded. The father's earnings are not large, and the house is insanitary, but more might be made of things if there were sobriety and thrift. There does not, however, appear to be great drunkenness, and five small children must be difficult to bring up on the money coming in. There are two women in the house. The eldest child dirty and fleabitten. Housing: seven in two rooms. Evidence from Police, Club, Employer, School-mistress and School Officer.

"197. The parents are thoroughly drunken and dissolute. They have sunk almost to the lowest depths of social degradation. There is no furniture in the house, and the five children are neglected and starved. One boy earns a trifle out of school hours. All accounts agree as to the character of the father and mother, though they have not been in the hands of the police. Second child has rickets, bronchitis, slight glands and is bow-legged. Two children have died. Housing: seven in two rooms. Evidence from Police, Parish Sister, Employer and

School-mistress.

"198. This house is fairly comfortable, and there is no evidence of drink, but the surroundings have a bad and depressing effect on the parents. The children are sent to school very untidy and dirty, and are certainly underfed. The father's wages are very small, and only one boy is working; there are six altogether. The mother chars occasionally. Food and clothing is given to school-children. The man is in a saving club. The eldest child fleabitten; body unwashed. The second, glands; fleabitten and dirty; cretinoid; much undergrown. Two have died. Housing: seven in two rooms. Evidence from School Charity, Factor, Police and School-mistress.

"199. The house was fairly comfortable and the man appeared to be intelligent and the wife hard-working, but the police reports are very bad; there are several convictions against the former. He has consequently been idle, and the burden of the family has rested on the wife. There are six children, two of them are working and earning a little, but a large amount of charity from school, church and private generosity keeps the family going. The children are fearfully verminous. There is a suggestion that some baby farming is done, so many are about. Eldest child anæmic; glands; head badly crusted; lice very bad. Second child, numerous glands; head covered with

crusts; lice very bad. Four have died. Housing: eight in two rooms. Evidence from Police, Teacher, Church, Parish Sister and Factor.

"200. The home is wretched and practically without furniture. The parents were married at ages 17 and 18. One child died, and their mode of life has been reckless, if not worse. The present means of subsistence cannot be ascertained, as the man is idle; however, he recently joined the Salvation Army and signed the pledge. The child at school is helped with food and clothes. The girl very badly bitten; lice and fleas, hair nits. Housing: four in one room. Evidence from Church, School Charity, Co-operative, Employer, Parish Sister, Police and School-mistress."

Total of children still living, 39.

Total of children dead, 27.

Need I go on? They are all after this fashion, eight hundred of them.

And if you turn from the congested town to the wholesome, simple country, here is the sort of home you have. This passage is a cutting from the Daily News of Jan. 1, 1907; and its assertions have never been contradicted. It fills one with only the mildest enthusiasm for the return of our degenerate townsmen "back to the land." I came upon

it as I read that morning's paper after drafting this chapter.

"Our attention has been called to a sordid Herefordshire tragedy recently revealed at an inquest on a child aged one year and nine months, who died in Weobly Workhouse of pneumonia. She entered the institution emaciated to half the proper weight of her age and with a broken arm--till then undiscovered--that the doctors found to be of about three weeks' standing. Her mother was shown to be in an advanced stage of consumption; one child had died at the age of seven months, and seven now remain. The father, whose work consists in tending eighty-nine head of cattle and ten pigs, is in receipt of eleven shillings a week, three pints of skim milk a day, and a cottage that has been condemned by the sanitary inspector and described as having no bedroom windows. We are not surprised to learn that the coroner, before taking the verdict, asked the house surgeon, who gave evidence, whether he could say that death 'was accelerated by anything.' Our wonder is that the reply was in the negative. The cottage is in the possession of the farmer who employs the man, but his landlord is said to be liable for repairs. That landlord is a clergyman of the Church of England, a J.P., a preserver of game, and owner of three or four thousand acres of land."

And here, again, is the Times, by no means a Socialist organ, generalizing from official statements:--



"Houses unfit for human habitation, rooms destitute of light and ventilation, overcrowding in rural cottages, contaminated water supplies, accumulations of every description of filth and refuse, a total absence of drainage, a reign of unbelievable dirt in milk-shops and slaughter-houses, a total neglect of bye-laws, and an inadequate supervision by officials who are frequently incompetent; such, in a general way, is the picture that is commonly presented in the reports of inquiries in certain rural districts made by medical officers of the Local Government Board."

And even of such homes as this there is an insufficiency. In 1891-95, more than a quarter of the deaths in London occurred in workhouses and other charitable institutions.[9] Now suppose the modern Socialist did want to destroy the home; suppose that some Socialists have in the past really wanted to do so, remember that that is the reality they wanted to destroy.

[9] Studies Scientific and Social, Vol. II., Ch. XXIV.; by  
Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace. (Macmillan & Co., 1900.)

But does the modern Socialist want to destroy the home? Rather, I hold, he wants to save it from a destruction that is even now going on, to--I won't say restore it, because I have very grave doubts if the world has ever yet held a high percentage of good homes, but raise

it to the level of its better realizations of happiness and security. And it is not only I say this, but all my fellow Socialists say it too. Read, for example, that admirable paper, "Economic and Social Justice," in Dr. Alfred Russel Wallace's *Studies Scientific and Social*, and you will have the clearest statement of the attitude of a representative modern Socialist to this question.

§ 2.

The reader must get quite out of his head the idea that the present system maintains the home and social purity.

In London at the present time there are thousands of prostitutes; in Paris, in Berlin, in every great city of Europe or America, thousands; in the whole of Christendom there cannot be less than a million of these ultimate instances of our civilization. They are the logical extremity of a civilization based on cash payments. Each of these women represents a smashed and ruined home and wasted possibilities of honour, service and love, each one is so much sheer waste. For the food they consume, their clothing, their lodging, they render back nothing to the community as a whole, and only a gross, dishonouring satisfaction to their casual employers. And don't imagine they are inferior women, that there has been any selection of the unfit in their sterilization; they are, one may see for oneself, well above the average in physical vigour, in spirit and beauty. Few of them have

come freely to their trade, the most unnatural in the world; few of them have anything but shame and loathing for their life; and most of them must needs face their calling fortified by drink and drugs. For virtuous people do not begin to understand the things they endure. But it pays to be a prostitute, it does not pay to be a mother and a home-maker, and the gist of the present system of individual property is that a thing must pay to exist.... So much for one aspect of our present system of a "world of homes."

Consider next the great army of employed men and women, shop assistants, clerks, and so forth, living in, milliners, typists, teachers, servants who have practically no prospect whatever of marrying and experiencing those domestic blisses the Socialist is supposed to want to rob them of. They are involuntary monks and nuns, celibate not from any high or religious motive, but through economic hardship. Consider all that amount of pent-up, thwarted or perverted emotional possibility, the sheer irrational waste of life implied....

We have glanced at the reality of the family among the poor; what is it among the rich? Does the wealthy mother of the upper middle-class or upper class really sit among her teeming children, teaching them in an atmosphere of love and domestic exaltation? As a matter of fact she is a conspicuously devoted woman if she gives them an hour a day--the rest of the time they spend with nurse or governess, and when they are ten or eleven off they go to board at the preparatory school. Whenever I find among my press-cuttings some particularly scathing denunciation

of Socialists as home-destroyers, as people who want to snatch the tender child from the weeping mother to immure it in some terrible wholesale institution, I am apt to walk out into my garden, from which three boarding-schools for little children of the prosperous classes are visible, and rub my eyes and renew that sight and marvel at my kind....

Consider now, with these things in mind, the real drift of the first main Socialist proposition, and compare its tendency with these contemporary conditions. Socialism regards parentage under proper safeguards and good auspices as "not only a duty but a service" to the State; that is to say it proposes to pay for good parentage--in other words to endow the home. Socialism comes not to destroy but to save.

And how will the endowment be done? Very probably it will be found that the most convenient and best method of doing this will be to subsidize the mother--who is, or should be, the principal person concerned in this affair--for her children; to assist her, not as a charity, but as a right in the period before the birth of her anticipated child, and afterwards to provide her with support for that child so long as it is kept clean in a tolerable home, in good health, well taught and properly clad. It will say to the sound mothering woman, Not type-writing, nor shirt-sewing, nor charring is your business--these children are. Neglect them, ill-treat them, prove incompetent, and your mother-right will cease and we shall take them away from you and do what we can for them; love them, serve them and,

through them, the State, and you will serve yourself. Is that destroying the home? Is it not rather the rescue of the home from economic destruction?

Certain restrictions, it is true, upon our present way of doing things would follow almost necessarily from the adoption of these methods. It is manifest that no intelligent State would willingly endow the homes of hopelessly diseased parents, of imbecile fathers or mothers, of obstinately criminal persons or people incapable of education. It is evident, too, that the State would not tolerate chance fatherhood, that it would insist very emphatically upon marriage and the purity of the home, much more emphatically than we do now. Such a case as the one numbered 197, a beautiful instance of the sweet, old-fashioned, homely, simple life of the poor we Socialists are supposed to be vainly endeavouring to undermine--would certainly be dealt with in a drastic and conclusive spirit....

### § 3.

So far Socialism goes toward regenerating the family and sustaining the home. But let there be no ambiguity on one point. It will be manifest that while it would reinvigorate and confirm the home, it does quite decidedly tend to destroy what has hitherto been the most typical form of the family throughout the world, that is to say the family which is in effect the private property of the father, the

patriarchal family. The tradition of the family in which we are still living, we must remember, has developed from a former state in which man owned the wife or child as completely as he owned horse or hut. He was the family's irresponsible owner. Socialism seeks to make him and his wife its jointly responsible heads. Until quite recently the husband might beat his wife and put all sorts of physical constraint upon her; he might starve her or turn her out of doors; her property was his; her earnings were his; her children were his. Under certain circumstances it was generally recognized he might kill her. To-day we live in a world that has faltered from the rigours of this position, but which still clings to its sentimental consequences. The wife now-a-days is a sort of pampered and protected half-property. If she leaves her husband for another man, it is regarded not as a public offence on her part, but as a sort of mitigated theft on the part of the latter, entitling the former to damages. Politically she doesn't exist; the husband sees to all that. But on the other hand he mustn't drive her by physical force, but only by the moral pressure of disagreeable behaviour. Nor has he the same large powers of violence over her children that once he had. He may beat--within limits. He may dictate their education so far as his religious eccentricities go, and be generous or meagre with the supplies. He may use his "authority" as a vague power far on into their adult life, if he is a forcible character. But it is at its best a shorn splendour he retains. He has ceased to be an autocrat and become a constitutional monarch; the State, sustained by the growing reasonableness of the world, intervenes more and more between him and the wife and children who

were once powerless in his hands.

The Socialist would end that old legal predominance altogether. The woman, he declares, must be as important and responsible a citizen in the State as the man. She must cease to be in any sense or degree private property. The man must desist from tyrannizing in the nursery and do his proper work in the world. So far, therefore, as the family is a name for a private property in a group of related human beings vesting in one of them, the Head of the Family, Socialism repudiates it altogether as unjust and uncivilized; but so far as the family is a grouping of children with their parents, with the support and consent and approval of the whole community, Socialism advocates it, would make it for the first time, so far as a very large moiety of our population is concerned, a possible and efficient thing.

Moreover, as the present writer has pointed out elsewhere,[10] this putting of the home upon a public basis destroys its autonomy. Just as the Socialist and all who have the cause of civilization at heart would substitute for the inefficient, wasteful, irresponsible, unqualified "private adventure school" that did such infinite injury to middle-class education in Great Britain during the Victorian period a public school, publicly and richly endowed and responsible and controlled, so the Socialist would put an end to the uncivilized go-as-you-please of the private adventure family. "Socialism in fact is the State family. The old family of the private individual must vanish before it just as the old water-works of private enterprise or

the old gas company." [11] To any one not idiotic nor blind with a passionate desire to lie about Socialism, the meaning of this passage is perfectly plain. Socialism seeks to broaden the basis of the family and to make the once irresponsible parent responsible to the State for its welfare. Socialism creates parental responsibility.

[10] Socialism and the Family. (A. C. Fifield. 6d.)

[11] Socialism and the Family.

§ 4.

And here we may give a few words to certain questions that are in reality outside the scope of Socialists altogether, special questions involving the most subtle ethical and psychological decisions. Upon them Socialists are as widely divergent as people who are not Socialists, and Socialism as a whole presents nothing but an open mind. They are questions that would be equally open to discussion in relation to an Individualist State or to any sort of State. Certain religious organizations have given clear and imperative answers to some or all of these questions, and so far as the reader is a member of such an organization, he may rest assured that Socialism, as an authoritative whole, has nothing to say for or against his convictions. This cannot be made too plain by Socialists, nor too frequently repeated by them. A very large part of the so-called



arguments against them arise out of deliberate misrepresentations and misconceptions of some alleged Socialist position in these indifferent matters.

I refer more particularly to the numerous problems in private morality and social organization arising from sexual conduct. May a man love one woman only in his life, or more, and may a woman love only one man? Should marriage be an irrevocable life union or not? Is sterile physical love possible, permissible, moral, honourable or intolerable? Upon all these matters individual Socialists, like most other people, have their doubts and convictions, but it is no more just to saddle all Socialism with their private utterances and actions upon these issues than it would be to declare that the Roman Catholic Communion is hostile to beauty because worshippers coming and going have knocked the noses off the figures on the bronze doors of the Church of San Zeno at Verona, or that Christianity involves the cultivation of private vermin, because of the condition of Saint Thomas à Beckett's hair shirt.[12] To argue in that way is to give up one's birthright as a reasonable being.

[12] "The haircloth encased the whole body down to the knees; the hair drawers, as well as the rest of the dress, being covered on the outside with white linen so as to escape observation; and the whole so fastened together as to admit of being readily taken off for his daily scourgings, of which yesterday's portion was still apparent in the

stripes on his body. Such austerity had hitherto been unknown to English saints, and the marvel was increased by the sight--to our notions so revolting--of the innumerable vermin with which the haircloth abounded--boiling over with them, as one account describes it, like water in a simmering cauldron. At the dreadful sight all the enthusiasm of the previous night revived with double ardour. They looked at each other in silent wonder, then exclaimed, 'See, see what a true monk he was, and we knew it not!' and burst into alternate fits of weeping and laughter, between the sorrow of having lost such a head, and the joy of having found such a saint." (Historical Memorials of Canterbury, by the Rev. Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, D.D.)

Upon certain points modern Socialism is emphatic; women and children must not be dealt with as private property, women must be citizens equally with men, children must not be casually born, their parents must be known and worthy; that is to say there must be deliberation in begetting children, marriage under conditions. And there Socialism stops.

Socialism has not even worked out what are the reasonable conditions of a State marriage contract, and it would be ridiculous to pretend it had. This is not a defect in Socialism particularly, but a defect in human knowledge. At countless points in the tangle of questions involved, the facts are not clearly known. Socialism does not present

any theory whatever about the duration of marriage, whether, as among the Roman Catholics, it should be absolutely for life, or, as some hold, for ever; or, as among the various divorce-permitting Protestant bodies, until this or that eventuality; or even, as Mr. George Meredith suggested some years ago, for a term of ten years. In these matters Socialism does not decide, and it is quite reasonable to argue that Socialism need not decide. Socialism maintains an attitude of neutrality. And the practical effect of an attitude of neutrality is to leave these things as they are at present. The State is not urgently concerned with these questions. So long as a marriage contract provides for the health and sanity of the contracting parties, and for their proper behaviour so far as their offspring is concerned, and for so long as their offspring need it, the demands of the community, as the guardian of the children, are satisfied. That certainly would be the minimum marriage, the State marriage, and I, for my own part, would exact nothing more in the legal contract. But a number of more representative Socialists than I are for a legally compulsory life marriage. Some--but they are mostly of the older, less definite, Social Democratic teaching--are for a looser tie. Let us clearly understand that we are here talking of the legal marriage only--the State's share. We are not talking of what people will do, but of how much they are to be made to do. A vast amount of stupid confusion arises from forgetting that. What was needed more than that minimum I have specified would be provided, I believe--it always has been provided hitherto, even to excess--by custom, religion, social influence, public opinion.

For it may not be altogether superfluous to remind the reader how little of our present moral code is ruled by law. We have in England, it is true, certain laws prescribing the conditions of the marriage contract, penalties of a quite ferocious kind to prevent bigamy, and a few quite trivial disabilities put upon those illegitimately born. But there is no legal compulsion upon any one to marry now, and far less legal restriction upon irregular and careless parentage than would be put in any scientifically organized Socialism. Do let us get it out of our heads that monogamy is enforced by law at the present time. It is not. You are only forbidden to enter into normal marriage with more than one person. If a man of means chooses to have as many concubines as King Solomon and live with them all openly, the law (I am speaking of Great Britain) will do nothing to prevent him. If he chooses to go through any sort of nuptial ceremony, provided it does not simulate a legal marriage, with some or all of them he may. And to any one who evades the legal marriage bond, there is a vast range of betrayal and baseness as open as anything can be. "Free Love" is open to any one who chooses to practise it to-day. The real controlling force in these matters is social influence, public opinion, a sort of conscience and feeling for the judgment of others that is part of the normal human equipment. And the same motives and considerations that keep people's lives pure and discreet now, will be all the more freely in operation under Socialism, when money will count for less and reputation for more than they do now. Modern Socialism is a project to change the organization of living and the circle of human ideas; but it is no

sort of scheme to attempt the impossible, to change human nature and to destroy the social sensitiveness of man.

I do not deny the intense human interest of these open questions, the imperative need there is to get the truth, whether one considers it to be one's own truth or the universal truth, upon them. But my point is that they are to be discussed apart from Socialist theory, and that anyhow they have nothing to do with Socialist politics. It is no doubt interesting to discuss the benefits of vaccination and the justice and policy of its public compulsion, to debate whether one should eat meat or confine oneself to a vegetable dietary, whether the overhead or the slot system is preferable for tramway traction, whether steamboats are needed on the Thames in winter, and whether it is wiser to use metal or paper for money; but none of these things have anything to do with the principles of Socialism. Nor need we decide whether Whistler, Raphael or Carpaccio has left us the most satisfying beauty, or which was the greater musician, Wagner, Scarlatti or Beethoven, nor pronounce on the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy in any prescribed way, because we accept Socialism.

Coming to graver matters there are ardent theologians who would create an absolute antagonism between Socialism and Christianity, who would tie up Socialism with some extraordinary doctrine of Predestination, or deny the possibility of a Christian being a Socialist or a Socialist being a Christian. But these are matters on different planes. In a sense Socialism is a religion; to me it is a religion, in

the sense, that is, that it gives a work to do that is not self-seeking, that it determines one in a thousand indecisions, that it supplies that imperative craving of so many human souls, a devotion. But I do not see why a believer in any of the accepted creeds of Christianity, from the Apostles' Creed upward, should not also whole-heartedly give himself to this great work of social reconstruction. To believe in a real and personal Heaven is surely not to deny earth with its tragedy, its sorrows, its splendid possibilities. It is simply to believe a little more concretely than I do, that is all. To assert the brotherhood of man under God seems to me to lead logically to a repudiation of the severities of Private Ownership--that is to Socialism. When the rich young man was told to give up his property to follow Christ, when the disciples were told to leave father and mother, it seems to me ridiculous to present Christianity as opposed to the self-abnegation of the two main generalizations of Socialism--that relating to property in things, and that relating to property in persons. It is true that the Church of Rome has taken the deplorable step of forbidding Socialism (or at least Socialismus) to its adherents; but there is no need for Socialists to commit a reciprocal stupidity. Let us Socialists at any rate keep our intellectual partitions up. The Church that now quarrels with Socialism once quarrelled with astronomy and geology, and astronomers and geologists went on with their own business. Both religion and astronomy are still alive and in the same world together. And the Vatican observatory, by the bye, is honourably distinguished for its excellent stellar photographs. Perhaps, after all, the Church

does not mean by Socialismus Socialism as it is understood in English; perhaps it simply means the dogmatically anti-Christian Socialism of the Continental type.

I am not advocating indifference to any interest I have here set aside as irrelevant to Socialism. Men have discussed and will, I hope, continue to discuss such questions as I have instanced with passionate zeal; but Socialism need not be entangled by their decisions. We can go on our road to Socialism, we can get to Socialism, to the Civilized State, whichever answer is given to any of these questions, great or small.