

CHAPTER X

SOCIALISM A DEVELOPING DOCTRINE

§ 1.

So far we have been discussing the broad elementary propositions of Modern Socialism. As we have dealt with them, they amount to little more than a sketch of the foundation for a great scheme of social reconstruction. It would be a poor service to Socialism to pretend that this scheme is complete. From this point onward one enters upon a series of less unanimous utterances and more questionable suggestions. Concerning much of what follows, Socialism has as yet not elaborated its teaching. It has to do so, it is doing so, but huge labours lie before its servants. Before it can achieve any full measure of realization, it has to overcome problems at present but half solved, problems at present scarcely touched, the dark unsettling suggestion of problems that still await formulation. The Anti-Socialist is freely welcome to all these admissions. No doubt they will afford grounds for some cheap transitory triumph. They affect our great generalizations not at all; they detract nothing from the fact that Socialism presents the most inspiring, creative scheme that ever came into the chaos of human affairs. The fact that it is not cut and dried, that it lives and grows, that every honest adherent adds not only to its forces but to its thought and spirit, is itself inspiration.

The new adherent to Socialism in particular must bear this in mind, that Socialism is no garment made and finished that we can reasonably ask the world to wear forthwith. It is not that its essentials remain in doubt, it is not that it does not stand for things supremely true, but that its proper method and its proper expedients have still to be established. Over and above the propaganda of its main constructive ideas and the political work for their more obvious and practical application, an immense amount of intellectual work remains to be done for Socialism. The battle for Socialism is to be fought not simply at the polls and in the market-place, but at the writing-desk and in the study. To many questions, the attitude of Socialism to-day is one of confessed inquiring imperfection.[17] It would indeed be very remarkable if a proposition for changes so vast and comprehensive as Socialism advances was in any different state at this present time.

[17] The student will find very clear, informing, and suggestive reading in Kirkup's History of Socialism (A. & C. Black, 1906). It is a fine, impartial account of these developments, which may well be used as a corrective (or confirmation) of this book.

It is so recently as 1833 that the world first heard the word Socialism.[18] It appeared then, with the vaguest implications and the most fluctuating definition, as a general term for a disconnected series of protests against the extreme theories of Individualism and

Individualist Political Economy; against the cruel, race-destroying industrial spirit that then dominated the world. Of these protests the sociological suggestions and experiments of Robert Owen were most prominent in the English community, and he it is, more than any other single person, whom we must regard as the father of Socialism. But in France ideas essentially similar were appearing about such movements and personalities as those of Saint Simon, Proudhon and Fourier. They were part of a vast system of questionings and repudiations, political doubts, social doubts, hesitating inquiries and experiments.

[18] It was probably first used in the Poor Man's Guardian in that year. See *The Life of Francis Place*, by Graham Wallas, p. 353.

It is only to be expected that early Socialism should now appear as not only an extremely imperfect but a very inconsistent system of proposals. Its value lay not so much in its plans as in its hopeful and confident denials. It had hold of one great truth; it moved one great amendment to the conception of practical equality the French Revolution had formulated, and that was its clear indication of the evil of unrestricted private property and of the necessary antagonism of the interests of the individual to the common-weal, of "Wealth against Commonwealth," that went with that. While most men had to go propertyless in a world that was privately owned, the assertion of equality was an empty lie. For the rest, primordial Socialism was entirely sketchy and experimental. It was wild as the talk of

school-boys. It disregarded the most obvious needs. It did not provide for any principle of government, or for the maintenance of collective thought and social determination, it offered no safeguards and guarantees for even the most elementary privacies and freedoms; it was extraordinarily non-constructive. It was extreme in its proposed abolition of the home, and it flatly ignored the huge process of transition needed for a change so profound and universal.

The early Socialism was immediately millennial. It had no patience. The idea was to be made into a definite project forthwith; Fourier drew up his compact scheme, arranged how many people should live in each phalange and so forth, and all that remained to do, he thought, was to sow phalanges as one scatters poppy seed. With him it was to be Socialism by contagion, with many of his still hastier contemporaries it was to be Socialism by proclamation. All the evils of society were to crumble to ruins like the Walls of Jericho at the first onset of the Great Idea.

Our present generation is less buoyant perhaps, but wiser. However young you may be as a reformer, you know you must face certain facts those early Socialists ignored. Whatever sort of community you dream of, you realize that it has to be made of the sort of people you meet every day or of the children growing up under their influence. The damping words of the old philosopher to the ardent Social reformer of seventeen were really the quintessence of our criticism of revolutionary Socialism: "Will your aunts join us, my dear? No!

Well--is the grocer on our side? And the family solicitor? We shall have to provide for them all, you know, unless you suggest a lethal chamber."

For a generation Socialism, in the exaltation of its self-discovery, failed to measure these primary obstacles, failed to recognize the real necessity, the quality of the task of making these people understand. To this day the majority of Socialists still fail to grasp completely the Herbartian truth, the fact that every human soul moves within its circle of ideas, resisting enlargement, incapable indeed if once it is adult of any extensive enlargement, and that all effectual human progress can be achieved only through such enlargement. Only ideas cognate to a circle of ideas are assimilated or assimilable; ideas too alien, though you shout them in the ear, thrust them in the face, remain foreign and incomprehensible.

The early Socialists, arriving at last at their Great Idea, after toilsome questionings, after debates, disputations, studies, trials, saw, and instantly couldn't understand those others who did not see; they failed altogether to realize the leaps they had made, the brilliant omissions they had achieved, the difficulties they had evaded to get to this magnificent conception. I suppose such impatience is as natural and understandable as it is unfortunate. None of us escape it. Much of this early Socialism is as unreal as mathematics, has much the same relation to truth as the abstract absolute process of calculation has to concrete individual things;

much of it more than justifies altogether that "black or white" method of criticism of which I wrote in the preceding chapter. They were as downright and unconsidering, as little capable of the reasoned middle attitude. Proudhon, perceiving that the world was obsessed by a misconception of the scope of property whereby the many were enslaved to the few, went off at a tangent to the announcement that "Property is Robbery," an exaggeration that, as I have already shown, still haunts Socialist discussion. The ultimate factor of all human affairs, the psychological factor, was disregarded. Like the classic mathematical problem, early Socialism was always "neglecting the weight of the elephant"--or some other--from the practical point of view--equally essential factor. This was, perhaps, an unavoidable stage. It is probable that by no other means than such exaggeration and partial statement could Socialism have got itself begun. The world of 1830 was fatally wrong in its ideas of property; early Socialism rose up and gave those ideas a flat, extreme, outrageous contradiction. After that analysis and discussion became possible.

The early Socialist literature teems with rash, suggestive schemes. It has the fertility, the confusion, the hopefulness, the promise of glowing youth. It is a quarry of ideas, a mine of crude expedients, a fountain of emotions. The abolition of money, the substitution of Labour Notes, the possibility, justice and advantage of equalizing upon a time-basis the remuneration of the worker, the relation of the new community to the old family, a hundred such topics were ventilated--were not so much ventilated as tossed about in an

impassioned gale.

Much of this earlier Socialist literature was like Cabet's book, actually Utopian in form; a still larger proportion was Utopian in spirit; its appeal was imaginative, and it aimed to be a plan of a new state as definite and detailed as the plan for the building of a house. It has been the fashion with a number of later Socialist writers and speakers, mind-struck with that blessed word "evolution," confusing "scientific," a popular epithet to which they aspired, with "unimaginative," to sneer at the Utopian method, to make a sort of ideal of a leaden practicality, but it does not follow because the Utopias produced and the experiments attempted were in many aspects unreasonable and absurd that the method itself is an unsound one. At a certain phase of every creative effort you must cease to study the thing that is, and plan the thing that is not. The early Socialisms were only premature plans and hasty working models that failed to work.

And it must be remembered when we consider Socialism's early extravagancies, that any idea or system of ideas which challenges the existing system is necessarily, in relation to that system, outcast. Mediocre men go soberly on the highroads, but saints and scoundrels meet in the gaols. If A and B rebel against the Government, they are apt, although they rebel for widely different reasons, to be classed together; they are apt indeed to be thrown together and tempted to sink even quite essential differences in making common cause against

the enemy. So that from its very beginning Socialism was mixed up--to this day it remains mixed up--with other movements of revolt and criticism, with which it has no very natural connection. There is, for example, the unfortunate entanglement between the Socialist theory and that repudiation of any but subjective sexual limitations which is called "free love," and there is that still more unfortunate association of its rebellion against orthodox economic theories, with rebellion against this or that system of religious teaching. Several of the early Socialist communities, again, rebelled against ordinary clothing, and their women made short hair and bloomers the outward and visible associations of the communistic idea. In Holyoake's History of Co-operation it is stated that one early experiment was known to its neighbours as "the grass-eating Atheists of Ham Common." I have done my very best (in Chapter VIII., § 2) to clear the exposition of Socialism from these entanglements, but it is well to recognize that these are no corruptions of its teaching, but an inevitable birth-infection that has still to be completely overcome.

§ 2.

The comprehensively constructive spirit of modern Socialism is very much to seek in these childhood phases that came before Marx. These early projects were for the most part developed by literary men (and by one philosophic business man, Owen) to whose circle of ideas the conception of State organization and administration was foreign. They

took peace and order for granted--they left out the school-master, the judge and the policeman, as the amateur architect of the anecdote left out the staircase. They set out to contrive a better industrial organization, or a better social atmosphere within the present scheme of things. They wished to reform what they understood, and what was outside their circle of ideas they took for granted, as they took the sky and sea. Not only was their literature Utopian literature, about little islands of things begun over again from the beginning, but their activities tended in the direction of Utopian experiments equally limited and isolated. Here again a just critic will differ from many contemporary Socialists in their depreciation of this sort of work. Owen's experiments in socialized production were of enormous educational and scientific value. They were, to use a mining expert's term, "hand specimens" of human welfare of the utmost value to promoters. They made factory legislation possible; they initiated the now immense co-operative movement; they stirred commonplace imaginations as only achievement can stir them; they set going a process of amelioration in industrial conditions that will never, I believe, cease again until the Socialist state is attained.

But apart from Owen and the general advertisement given to Socialist ideas, it must be admitted that a great majority of Socialist communities have, by every material standard, failed rather than succeeded. Some went visibly insolvent and to pieces, others were changed by prosperity. Some were wrecked by the sudden lapse of the treasurer into an extreme individualism. Essentially Socialism is a

project for the species, but these communities made it a system of relationships within a little group; to the world without they had necessarily to turn a competitive face, to buy and sell and advertise on the lines of the system as it is. If they failed, they failed; if they succeeded they presently found themselves landlords, employers, no more and no less than a corporate individualism. I have described elsewhere[19] the fate of the celebrated Oneida community of New York State, and how it is now converted into an aggressive, wealthy, fighting corporation of the most modern type, employing immigrant labour.

[19] The Future in America. (Chapman & Hall, 1906.)

Professed and conscious Socialism in its earliest stages, then, was an altogether extreme proposition, it was at once imperfect and over-emphatic, and it was confused with many quite irrelevant and inconsistent novelties with regard to diet, dress, medicine and religion. Its first manifest, acknowledged and labelled fruits were a series of futile "communities"--Noyes' History of American Socialisms gives their simple history of births and of fatal infantile ailments--Brook Farm, Fourierite "Phalanges" and the like. But correlated with these extreme efforts, drawing ideas and inspiration from them, was the great philanthropic movement for the amelioration of industrialism, that was, I insist, for all its absence of a definite Socialist label in many cases, an equally legitimate factor in the making of the great conception of modern Socialism.

Socialism may be the child of the French Revolution, but it certainly has one aristocratic Tory grandparent. There can be little dispute of the close connection of Lord Shaftesbury's Factory Acts, that commencement of constructive statesmanship in industrialism, with the work of Owen. The whole Victorian period marks a steady development of social organization out of the cruel economic anarchy of its commencement; the beginnings of public education, adulteration acts and similar checks upon the extremities of private enterprise, the great successful experiments of co-operative consumers' associations and the development of what has now become a quasi-official representation of labour in the State through the Trade Unions. Two great writers, Carlyle and Ruskin, the latter a professed Socialist, spent their powers in a relentless campaign against the harsh theories of the liberty of property, the gloomy superstitions of political economy that barred the way to any effectual constructive scheme. An enormous work was done throughout the whole Victorian period by Socialists and Socialistic writers, in criticizing and modifying the average circle of ideas, in bringing conceptions that had once seemed weird, outcast and altogether fantastic, more and more within the range of acceptable practicality.

The first early Socialisms were most various and eccentric upon the question of government and control. They had no essential political teaching. Many, but by no means all, were inspired by the democratic idealism of the first French Revolution. They believed in a mystical something that was wiser and better than any individual,--the People,

the Common Man. But that was by no means the case with all of them. The Noyes community was a sort of Theocratic autocracy; the Saint Simonian tendency was aristocratic. The English Socialism that in the middle Victorian period developed partly out of the suggestions of Owen's beginnings and partly as an independent fresh outpouring of the struggling Good Will in man, that English Socialism that found a voice in Ruskin and in Maurice and Kingsley and the Christian Socialists, was certainly not democratic. It kept much of what was best in the "public spirit" of contemporary English life, and it implied if it did not postulate a "governing class." Benevolent and even generous in conception, its exponents betray all too often the ties of social habituations, the limited circle of ideas of English upper and upper middle-class life, easy and cultivated, well served and distinctly, most unmistakably, authoritative.

While the experimental Utopian Socialisms gave a sort of variegated and conflicting pattern of a reorganized industrialism and (incidentally to that) a new heaven and earth, the benevolent Socialism, Socialistic Liberalism and Socialistic philanthropy of the middle Victorian period, really went very little further in effect than a projected amelioration and moralization of the relations of rich and poor. It needed the impact of an entirely new type of mind before Socialism began to perceive its own significance as an ordered scheme for the entire reconstruction of the world, began to realize the gigantic breadth of its implications.