

Theosophical Sifting

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Theosophy and Modern Socialism.

By J. BRAILSFORD-BRIGHT, M.A., Oxon.

Practical Work for Theosophists.

By ANNIE BESANT, F.T.S.



(SECOND EDITION.)

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THEOSOPHY & MODERN SOCIALISM

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PRACTICAL WORK FOR THEOSOPHISTS.

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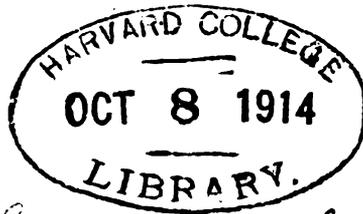
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THEOSOPHY AND MODERN SOCIALISM.

THE writer of an article on "Brotherhood" in the December number of LUCIFER has given an erroneous impression of Socialism, which, as a student of Theosophy (I do not know if I can yet call myself a "disciple") who has been in a large measure drawn to this great study *through Socialism*, I may, perhaps, be allowed to correct. Indeed, I should feel that I was shirking a task clearly indicated to me at the present moment were I to leave such errors, so far as all the readers of LUCIFER are concerned, uncorrected.

"T. B. H.," the writer of the article in question—an interesting and, I believe, useful article in many respects—has, I venture to conjecture, confused the general system or class of systems known as Socialism with certain methods of propagating its principles. Let me commence by quoting the paragraph in his article to which I take exception. He says (LUCIFER, No. 3, p. 213):—

(1) "Socialism, as preached during this nineteenth century, it [the Universal Brotherhood, which is the mainspring of Theosophy.—J. B. B.] certainly is not. (2) Indeed, there would be little difficulty in showing that modern materialistic Socialism is directly at variance with all the teachings of Theosophy. (3) Socialism advocates a direct interference with the results of the law of *Karma*, and would attempt to alter the *dénouement* of the parable of the talents by giving to the man who hid his talent in a napkin a portion of the ten talents acquired by the labour of his more industrious fellow."

I will first take the three statements contained in this paragraph separately, and, for convenience's sake, in inverted order. The allegation against Socialism contained in the third is the most specific, and that which, in the eyes of Theosophists, must appear the most serious. This statement—namely, that "Socialism requires a direct interference with the results of the law of *Karma*, and would attempt," etc.—constitutes, in fact, the only definite premise in his argument. Of course, if Socialists do advocate, consciously or unconsciously, anything of the sort, they advocate a physical and psychical impossibility, and their movement is doomed

to failure. More than this, if they do so *consciously*, they are sinning against the light, and are impious as well as childish in their efforts. Of such, clearly, the Universal Brotherhood is not.

But neither Socialists nor Socialism, "as preached in this nineteenth century," does anything of the kind.

By "materialistic" Socialism, I presume "T. B. H." implies (if he has really *studied* Socialism at all, which I venture to doubt) so much of it as can be argued upon purely worldly grounds, such as the better feeding, housing, etc., of those who do the active work of society, technical instruction, such general education as fits a man for the domestic and secular duties of life, and the reorganization of society with these objects upon a "co-operative basis," in which public salaried officials, elected by their fellows, will take the place of capitalists and landlords, and in which the production and distribution of wealth will be more systematically regulated. This system, of course, takes no account of the law of Karma.

In a rough sort of way, however, all Socialists recognise the law, so far as its effects are visible in this world in the physical, intellectual, and moral planes. The fact that "the evil that men do" (and that classes and nations do also) "lives after them," none are more ready to own and act upon. The action and re-action of individual *will* and individual and social *circumstance* both upon each other and upon individual and social *conditions* forms part of the foundations of Socialism. *Qua* Socialists, we do not, of course, take any more account of the law of Karma than do non-Socialistic Christians and Agnostics, but I maintain that there is nothing whatever in Socialism repugnant to this law. If anything, indeed, it is the other way. All Socialists, whether they call themselves Collectionists or Anarchists, Christian Socialists, Communists, or purely economic Socialists, are anxious to give freer play to human abilities and social impulses, by creating leisure and educational opportunities for all. We may thus, if it is permitted to me to speculate while criticising, become the instruments of a greater equalization and acceleration of Karmic growth, "good" or "evil," upon and among individual souls during their incarnation upon this planet. This would come to pass by the transfer of a great deal of the responsibility for Karmic results—which now lies with each individual in his personal capacity—to the collective entities composed of individuals acting in public capacities, *e.g.*, as nations, provinces, communes, or trade corporations.

It is surely accurate even now to speak of a collective—*e.g.*, a national or municipal—Karma, as we do of a national conscience. We speak of reward or retribution to nations and cities as if they had distinct personalities; are these mere figures of speech? But what is more important is that Socialists may prepare the way for a revelation of the

noble truths of Theosophy to the multitude; they may help to raise the intellectual and instinctive moral standard of the whole community to such an extent that all will, in the next generation following after the Social Revolution, be amenable to these truths. In this way, Socialism would not, indeed, interfere with the results of the law of Karma, but would, as the precursor of Theosophy, be the indirect means of enabling multitudes to rise and free themselves from its bonds.

As to the parable of the talents, well, Socialists would be only too glad to see its moral better enforced in this and other civilized countries. To them it seems impossible that it could be less enforced or taken to heart than it is now. They see that under the present system of society—that vast engine of usury, by which whole classes are held in economic servitude to other classes—many are encouraged to live in sloth and hide their talents, even if they put them to no worse use. This could hardly happen under a *régime* of economic Socialism (such a *régime*, for instance, as Lawrence Grönlund contemplates in his “Co-operative Commonwealth”), for these able-bodied or talented citizens who declined to work would simply be left to starve or sponge upon their relatives. Under a purely Communist *régime*, no doubt there would be a few who would shirk their proper share of social work, but at least none would be brought up from infancy, as now, to “eat the bread of idleness.”

Finally, on this point, if to advocate such changes as Socialists advocate—the substitution of social co-operation for competition; of production with a view to use for production with a view to profit; of peace between nations, classes, and individuals, for war; of harmonious organization, to the advantage of all, for *laissez faire* and chaos for the advantage or supposed advantage of a few—if, I say, to advocate such changes be to advocate an interference with the results of the law of Karma, so must be every proposal for the amelioration of the physical or intellectual welfare of our fellows. And if participation in this and other movements, which may with equal justice be called materialistic, be prohibited to Theosophists, they may as well, for all the good their Universal Brotherhood will do to the masses of those at present outside it, stay at home and content themselves with communing with the select few who alone will ever be in a position to appreciate them. If, for one reason or another, they do not care to co-operate with Socialists, let them at least recognise that the latter are preparing their way for them, doing the dirty (?) and laborious work without which Theosophy can never descend, from the serene heights on which it now dwells, to enlighten spiritually this sadly benighted world. For, apart from a healthier physical and psychical atmosphere than civilized life engenders in either rich or poor (collective Karmic

effects), a fair amount of leisure and freedom from sordid care is indispensable to most human beings for the higher development of the perceptive or gnostic faculties. At present this minimum of leisure and economic independence is probably unattainable by nineteen-twentieths of the population, yet this self-same society, with its scientific learning and experience, its machinery, and its business organization, contains within it all the germs of such a reconstruction of the physical environment as shall very shortly place the means of spiritual and psychical regeneration within the reach of all.

“T. B. H.’s” second statement is that “Indeed, there would be very little difficulty in showing that modern materialistic Socialism is directly at variance with all the teachings of Theosophy.” Such an expression as “materialistic Socialism” is, as I have already hinted, erroneous. *All* Socialism is materialistic in the sense that it concerns itself primarily with the material or physical conditions of mankind. So do chemistry and mechanics, pure or applied; so, in ordinary politics, do Liberalism and Conservatism. *No* Socialism is materialistic in the sense that it is based upon any materialistic as distinct from spiritualistic or pantheistic conceptions of the universe. It has hardly any more to do with such questions than have cotton-spinning or boot-making. I do not, however, pretend to mistake “T. B. H.’s” meaning. Taking Socialism in its purely economic aspect (which I admit is the foremost for the present, and must remain so until disposed of), he asserts that “there would be very little difficulty in proving,” etc. This is a mere general charge against it, although, I think, a less plausible and, therefore—from the point of view of harmony between Socialists and Theosophists—a less serious one than the particular charge which follows it, and with which I have already endeavoured to deal. For my own enlightenment I would like to have some samples, taken at random, of his skill in showing this variance; but I doubt if such a demonstration could effect any good. Moreover, it is impossible to *answer* the charge on account of its vague, albeit sweeping and all-comprehensive, character. “All the teachings of Theosophy” are quite too much for a student like myself to attempt to compare them with economic Socialism as a system. Nor do I think one with ten times the learning and discernment that I can claim would readily attempt it. I merely record, therefore, my sincere conviction that on this general point “T. B. H.” is also mistaken, and that it is not Socialism, economic or otherwise, which he has really been scrutinizing, but the sayings and doings of some particular “Socialist” whom he has seen or read of. Individual Socialists have, of course, many faults which cannot fairly be charged to the social and economic tenets they profess. Thus one besetting fault of militant advocates of the cause is the use of violent

language against individual capitalists, police officials, and landlords. It is so easy, even for men of a calibre superior to the average, to be drawn on from righteous indignation against a corrupt system to abuse of the ~~creatures~~ and instruments thereof, or even, on occasion, to personal violence against them. Every good cause has its Peters no less than its Judases. Socialism, unfortunately, has a rich crop of the former. Another still worse fault on the part of certain agitators, but one which might easily be predicted from the character of the struggle and the condition of the classes who must form the backbone of the Socialistic party, is the frequent appeal to lower motives, such as revenge and love of luxury.

But such faults, although by all human prevision necessary incidents in the movement, are by no means inherent in Socialism. Even the purely "materialistic" Socialism of Karl Marx, to which "T. B. H." seems (although, I think, not with any clear picture of it in his mind) to refer, aims simply at securing the decencies and ordinary comforts of life to all as a recompence for more evenly distributed social labour. The very conditions of life under a co-operative commonwealth such as Hyndman, Grönlund, and other followers of the late Karl Marx's economic ideal, have in view, above all the obligation (virtual, at any rate) under which every able-bodied member of the community would find himself or herself to do a few hours of useful work of one kind or another every day, and the elimination of the commercial and speculative element, with the wretched insecurity and dangerous temptations which it involves, would preclude inordinate luxury. A healthy simplicity of life would become first "fashionable," then usual. Communism, of course, goes further than economic Socialism, as it implies not only the claim of the individual upon the community for the means of *labour* and the enjoyment of its fruits or their equivalent, but his claim for *subsistence*, irrespective of the amount and social value of the labour which he is able to perform. It would abolish, therefore, not only individual property in the means of production, but in the products themselves. The practicability of Communism, the motto of which is "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs," obviously depends upon the prevalence of more generous motives, of a higher sense of duty both to work and to give, a more perfect development, in fact, of the sense of human solidarity. It is for this very reason more commendable than mere economic Socialism, as an ideal, to the attention of Theosophists, although its appreciation, on the national or universal scale, cannot yet be said to have entered "the sphere of practical politics."

Communism, which may be either collectivist or anarchist, leads me to add a few words about Anarchism. I refer, of course, to the socia

ideal philosophically denoted by this name, and not to the means advocated by some of its supporters for putting an end to the present society. Anarchism involves Communism as well as extreme decentralization; more than this, it involves the abolition of all permanent machinery of law and order such as the State is supposed to provide, and the abolition of physical force as a method of suasion even for criminals and lunatics. As a protest against political domination of all kinds, and an antidote to the excessive centralization advocated by some State Socialists, Anarchism may be of some use; but it is obviously further even than Communism (of the collective variety) from becoming a school of "practical" politics. It could only become so after society at large, all the world over, had grown sufficiently homogeneous and *solidaire* for its members to co-operate automatically for all necessary purposes, grouping themselves into large or small organizations (limbs and organs) as required, and forming a complete *body social*, or Mesocosm, if I may be allowed to coin a word for the purpose.

The erroneous conceptions of Socialism which I believe "T. B. H." to have formed do not necessarily invalidate the first statement in the paragraph of his article upon which I have been commenting, to wit, that the Universal Brotherhood which he has in view (and which, I understand from him, forms a part of the programme of the Theosophical Society) is not "Socialism as preached in the nineteenth century, or at any other time, past or future, for that matter." Still I am inclined to hope that a more intimate study of Socialism will lead him to see that, whether identical or not, they are at any rate not antagonistic. My own belief is that Theosophy and "materialistic" Socialism will be found to be working along different planes in the same direction. Any Universal Brotherhood of Theosophists must be based upon Socialist principles, *inter alia*; its foundations may extend further and deeper than those of Socialism, but cannot be less extensive. Greed and war (political or industrial), social caste and privilege, political domination of man over man, are as out of place in a true brotherhood as wolves in a flock of sheep. Yet the exclusion of these anti-social demons and the enthronement in their place of Universal Love and Peace, if effected by such a Brotherhood, would simply leave Socialists nothing to do but to organize the material framework of their co-operative commonwealths. To preach economic or "materialistic" Socialism to a world already converted to the highest and completest form of Socialism would be to advocate the plating of gold with tin or copper.

Modern Socialism, if the noble aspirations of some of its apostles may be taken as an earnest of its future, is already developing (incidentally, of course, to its main economic and ethical doctrines) strong æsthetic and

spiritual tendencies. No reader of William Morris or Edward Carpenter, to speak of English Socialists only, will fail to notice this. At present the mass of Socialists content themselves with basing their social and economic faith upon the ethical principles of Justice, Freedom, and Brotherhood. But the highest, because most mystical, of these principles, that of Brotherhood, or better, Human Solidarity—the ancient conception of “charity”—forms the unconscious link between modern Socialism on the one hand and Esoteric Buddhism, Esoteric Christianity, and Theosophy generally, on the other. I say *unconscious* link, but I mean to imply that it may soon be rendered conscious and visible. As the various “orthodox” varieties, first of Christianity, then of Mahomedanism, perish with the collapse or destruction of the social systems that have grown up along with them, this simple religion of Human Solidarity will take possession of the deserted shrines of Christ and Allah, and will begin to seek out its own fount of inspiration. Then will be the time for the Universal Brotherhood of Theosophists to step into the breach.

I must now turn to certain higher aspects of Socialism and the modern Socialist movement, at which, hitherto, I have done little more than hint.

I am partly guided in this task by Mr. Harbottle's letter in the January number of LUCIFER, which indicates some points of variance or misunderstanding existing between us. I trust that even if this article fails, as it may well do, to effect a complete reconciliation on all points of disagreement between Socialists and those Theosophists who are at present opposed to Socialism, it may at least elicit a few sparks of truth in the mere process of “clearing the issues.” I shall not attempt to treat the two parts of my subject, that which refers to the economic and that which refers to the higher aspects of Socialism, separately, as they are too intimately connected with each other in their relationship to the Theosophic movement to permit of their being conveniently separated.

I have already endeavoured to show that Mr. Harbottle, and any who think like him, are wrong in supposing that Socialism or its adherents advocate “a direct (or for that matter, *any* kind of) interference with the results of the law of Karma.” I have admitted that if I were mistaken, Socialism was foredoomed to failure. But surely Mr. Harbottle must agree with me, for he states, and very justly, that “the Socialist movement is itself a part of the cyclic Karma.” But I hardly find him consistent with himself when he goes on to add that “in its endeavour to rectify what seem, from its limited point of view, injustices, it cannot fail to be unjust to those, the justice of whose position in life it declines to recognise.” What does this mean? Can a *part*, or as I shall prefer to express it, an *agent*, of Karma, be accused of injustice? If so, QUI

CUSTODIET IPSOS COSTODES ? Surely not either Mr. Harbottle or myself, or any other contributor to **LUCIFER**.

When I suggested that Socialists might be regarded as "the instruments of a greater equalization, distribution, and acceleration of Karmic growth," and that this would come about "by transferring a great deal of the responsibility for Karmic results which now lies with each individual in his personal capacity upon the collective entities composed of individuals acting in public capacities," I implied much the same as I understand Mr. Harbottle to mean when he speaks of the Socialist movement as a part of the cyclic Karma. But I implied rather more than he does. Many other much less important movements than the Socialist may be equally regarded as forming part of the great cyclic Karma. Even reactionary movements (that is to say, movements contrary to the now prevailing tendencies of human and social evolution) may claim, inasmuch as they form part of the inevitable back current, to be described in the same language; and those who take part in them may claim to be the inferior agents of Nature—although, of course, if they do so in obedience to their own lower instincts and prejudices, and not "according to their lights," they will individually suffer for it. The same, for that matter, applies to those who are helping the main or forward currents, but from selfish motives.

The real question, then, for Theosophists to consider is not merely whether Socialism forms part of the cyclic Karma, for that is not worth their while disputing, but whether it forms part of the progressive and main evolutionary current, or of the retrogressive back current. If the former, as I firmly believe, then those who at present oppose it may not, indeed, all be constrained to turn back, like Saul of Tarsus, and fight on its side: some may conceive they have higher work to perform in Nature's service, or work more adapted to their powers and opportunities. But let them, at least, examine and ascertain for themselves, according to their lights, the true answer to this question before they continue to *oppose* Socialism, lest haply they be found fighting against the gods.

Let my suggestions on the subject stand for what they are worth. I may state my own position rather more elaborately and "scientifically," by saying that I believe we have reached a stage in human evolution on this planet in which a great many of the activities, and corresponding responsibilities, formerly attaching to individuals as such, are about to be, or are actually in the course of being, transferred to collective entities, or aggregations of individuals acting in a collective capacity, such as municipalities, unions or communes, provinces, nations, and confederations. I do not, of course, mean to imply that individual activities, individual progress in this life, will become merged and lost in collective progress,

but simply that in the action and reaction of the individual and social entities, the importance of the influence of the latter will *increase*, while that of the former *relatively decreases*. Physiology teaches us that in the lower forms of animal organisms, the life of the constituent organs—nay, even of the constituent protoplasmic cells—is much less dependent upon that of the entire body, than in the higher forms. So also in the case of social organisms, as I read evolution. Since the break-up of the primitive European civilizations (primitive, at least, so far as extant history, comparative politics and archæology enable us to see), which seem to have developed communistic social organisms on the tribal scale, the current of social evolution was set, until quite recently, in the direction of Individualism.*

This Individualism may be said to have culminated in the material plane in Modern Industrialism, or individual and class monopoly in the means of production; in the intellectual plane in the supremacy of the Baconian method of experiment; in the moral plane in Utilitarianism, and in the spiritual (where that retains any substance) in Calvinism. But even while at the height of its power—say 1850-70—Individualism carried within it the seeds of its final destruction. The principles of a new society had already been formulated by reformers and “Utopians” of various schools, while the growth of discontent among the uncomfortable classes more than kept pace with that of sympathy among the comfortable. The evolutionary current has now distinctly changed its course and is running at a daily-accelerating speed in the direction of a more perfect Communism—a Communism no longer on the tribal scale, but on the national, or possibly in some departments of the social activities on a still larger scale, and founded on a more complex yet more solid basis. In this higher form of social life, the interests and destinies of each member or component cell of the social organism will be more closely bound up than in the past with the organic whole. Mr. E. Belfort Bax, of the Socialist League, has recently expressed the final possibilities of communistic solidarity in a sentence which I shall do well to quote. It comes at the end of a series of articles entitled “The New Ethic” (THE COMMONWEAL, February 4th to February 25th), written from a materialist rather than pantheist standpoint, which contain, nevertheless, a great deal of interest for Theosophists. Speaking of “the inadequacy of the individual

* It is to be remarked that ancient Pantheism decayed about the same time as ancient Communism, making place for the various exoteric sects of classical times, and (save for a few lucid intervals in which great teachers stepped forward to redeem as much of humanity as possible from the materialistic superstitions in which it was steeped) for the newer systems known as Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism, Mussulmanism, Modern Buddhism, etc. In pure philosophy it gave way to various materialistic and spiritualistic schools of thought; Spiritualism and Materialism representing simply the face and obverse of the coin of individualistic philosophy.

as an end to himself"—the basis of the new Ethic—he suggests that we may regard this growing sense as "the indication that the *final purpose* of society, as such, is not to be merely for the consciousness of its component personalities, but that they are in the end destined to be absorbed in a corporate social consciousness ; just as the separate sentiency of the *organic* components of an animal or human body are absorbed in the unified sentiency and intelligence of that body."

But just as in the evolution of animal life, of man himself, form has preceded substance in its manifestations, so in the social evolution also. Just as in the physical body rudimentary organs appear, and develop almost to perfection before their complete uses are discovered or revealed, so in the social body, parts, if not the whole of the framework of the harmonious organisms of the future, will be evolved (if some of them have not been already) before the perfect harmony can be attained. There can be very little doubt that Economic Collectivism, based partly upon existing political forms, and upon existing national aggregations, is the next stage of social evolution, the preliminary or provisional form in which the new society will manifest itself. Few Socialists are so sanguine as to suppose that the present generation will see the realization of the higher ideal, perfect Communism ; but most believe in the possibility—at any rate in those countries like England, France, Belgium, and America, where Individualism has most completely run its course—of realizing economic Socialism, or Collectivism, within a decade or two. The triumphs of State and Municipal Socialism on the one side, and of Co-operative Capitalism on the other, are continually preparing the way for the democracy to follow as soon as it gets the chance, while the increasing number of persons engaged in them forms the leaven of administrative ability which will secure the success of the Collectivist Commonwealths when once they are established.

The first evident advances effected by the Social Revolution will certainly be in the material domain, and this is the only sense in which I am ready to admit that the Socialist movement is *materialistic*. So, of course, are all other movements having in view the material welfare of those who suffer under the present social order, or, rather, disorder. The abolition of chattel slavery in the British possessions, and subsequently in those American States which had previously recognised it, was the result of a humanitarian movement strictly analogous to and comparable with the modern Socialist movement, so far as its advocacy by the middle and "comfortable" classes is concerned ; but not nearly so unselfish, since many of those who advocated it had everything to gain by the abolition of the competition of slave-labour with that of "free," or wage-labour. The present middle-class advocates of Socialism, that is to say of

the abolition of the wage-labour system itself—a system entailing in many places a much worse and more degrading form of slavery than that of the plantations *—may fairly claim that there is no element of self-interest in their advocacy, for the material benefits which would result to them by the immediate establishment of Socialism, in any of its forms, are very doubtful. They would be saved the risks of bankruptcy and ruin, it is true, but in other respects many of them would have to give up their existing advantages, and betake themselves to industries and services, for which their former lives had ill-fitted them.

As to working-class Socialists, of course they are fighting for the material redemption and emancipation of their own class; but I think it ill-becomes their opponents among the privileged classes, those who under the present system of society live on their labour, to accuse them of selfishness and “materialism” because they wish to relieve themselves and their children of their present almost intolerable burdens. Of course, I do not claim for the victims of the present system that they are as a class one whit less selfish *by nature* than their masters and conscious or unconscious oppressors. Many of them may even be suffering, as Mr. Harbottle seems to suggest, from the evil Karmic growths which they have accumulated during past existences. But that is not for their fellow-men to judge. Nor would it, if true, justify those who become aware of the material causes of their suffering in this life, and who are able to help them in destroying these causes, in raising the old cry, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” What Socialists are now endeavouring to make plain to all, is that *everyone* is, in his political or *collective* capacity, his brother’s keeper. He is shirking his duty as a conscious agent of evolution, that is of Nature, if he refuses to recognise this.

Even Economic Socialism, therefore, has its higher aspect. The cultivation of solidarity or fraternal co-operation among the wage-slaves and their friends for the emancipation of labour all the world over, the cultivation of the sense of collective or corporate responsibility among all, for the victims of the present Social Juggernaut of capital and privilege, is the very essence of the movement, even in this its most “moderate” but most “materialistic” form. The spirit of solidarity and collective responsibility must, of course, precede as well as accompany, and result from, the progress of the economic movement. It stands to the latter in the relations of cause, accessory, and consequence. Modern civilization, with all its rottenness, has proved a blessing in this

* It was to the *advantage* of the owners of chattel-slaves to take care of them, if only in order to preserve valuable property in a condition of efficiency, whereas the capitalist employer of “free” labour (labour free to accept his conditions or else starve) has no such sense of interest in the health and well-being of his “hands,” whom he can replace when worn out without any fresh outlay.

respect, that it has developed within it this motive force for its final regeneration. Capitalist production has necessitated the massing together of the workers in large towns, under miserable conditions compared with those of the independent artisans of the towns and villages of olden times ; but these very conditions have taught them the necessary lesson of their material inter-dependence, and enabled them better to grasp the higher notion of the inter-dependence of Society and the world at large. Socialism has, then, come to take hold of and develop this germ of the spirit of solidarity, guiding the people in their vague aspirations towards social co-operation, and giving them a definite ideal. Thus the motive power, generated by past economic conditions, is developed by Socialists and utilized for the destruction of old and the production of new economic forms, which in their turn shall generate new and higher motive forces. This, I think, must be recognised as Nature's own course of evolution, so far, at least, as our free-thinking intellect and ordinary means of observation can ascertain. Thus the Form (Economic Socialism in practice) will be found to precede the substance (complete Human Solidarity, or the Spirit of Socialism), but depends for its own evolution upon a less-perfected Substance (the Spirit of Solidarity), which is itself the product of pre-existing Forms. But both the form and the substance, which will eventually carry us much further than Economic Collectivism, are evolving simultaneously ; and from the higher standpoint of Theosophic Pantheism I can see no good in attempting to dogmatize as to which precedes, or ought to precede, the other. Let us merely admit that they are so mutually dependent, that the one cannot be good and the other evil.

But if it be true that the Socialist movement, in its practical effects, is confined for the present to the material domain, that its first victories would be in that domain, and that its present supporters for the most part do not look beyond it, I cannot concede that there is nothing in Socialism to command the attention of Theosophists from higher points of view. The movement to my mind is simply part of the great evolutionary current which is bringing back the true Golden Age, the age in which Humanity and Divinity, Love and Wisdom, will once more be united as they have never been within historical times. Economic Socialism I look upon simply as the necessary form which precedes, and foreshadows, the substance. The man cannot become a complete man until he has first become a complete human animal ; the divine spark has no temple yet to occupy. Neither can society at large in any nation or world become a true spiritualized organism, until it has first evolved the form necessary for the development of something like what Mr. Bax has termed a corporate consciousness. If the present capitalistic régime, with its seething warrens of

human misery, will come to be regarded by posterity as Laurence Grönlund describes it, as the teething period of society, the next, or collective *régime*, will doubtless correspond with the school. Its individual members having been run for a generation or two into the same educational mould; and class distinctions and antipathies having died a natural death (their social and economic roots being destroyed), society will acquire the cohesion of a well-ordered family, and the next step, under Communism, to complete fraternity and solidarity, will be a comparatively easy one. It will be for society the zenith of sensual, æsthetic, and other purely human pleasures, as youth is for the individual. But the potentialities of the higher life will already have been realized by many, and *all* will be growing ripe for self-revelation of the higher truths.* I look forward to a time when it will be just as exceptional to find an individual destitute of that *auto-gnosis* which may become the instrument of psychic regeneration and development, as it is now to find one born both deaf and blind, and thus incapable of intellectual development by educational processes. The social commonwealths of the future will act first as physical and intellectual, then as psychical and spiritual, forcing-houses for humanity. I do not mean to say that any evolution or revolution of the social structure will change the sum total of experiences, painful and pleasurable, for each individual, but that in the existence or existences which he passes under the coming *régime*, the liberties and opportunities for experience of all kinds being enormously multiplied, he will be *ripened* at a much faster rate; also that the difference between the average and the extremes of individual conditions will be very much reduced. If I am right in this forecast, I may truly maintain that Socialism, although itself but part of the evolutionary current now prevailing, does and will act as the precursor of *supra*-evolutionary progress, and is calculated to "raise the intellectual and instinctive moral standard of the whole community to such an extent that all will, in the next generation after the Social Revolution, be amenable to the truths of Theosophy."

Roughly, my idea as to materialistic and utilitarian tendencies is that these will, under the social commonwealth, *burn themselves out*. The grosser forms of luxury, which have flourished so easily under modern capitalistic and ancient slave-owning communities, will be almost impossible in a state of society in which idle and parasitical classes are abolished. Industry and social equality will not be fruitful soil for such vices. On the other hand, free scope will be given to the development of the more social luxuries, and especially to the arts. Great

* To prevent all misapprehension, the writer wishes to say that he has not himself embraced the higher life, and lays no claim to any higher intuition than is possible for those who, like himself, are living both in the world and of it.

reforms will, no doubt, be introduced at an early period in the physical education of children, and in the ordinary personal habits of all the citizens. These reforms, partly individual, partly collective, in their initiation, will of themselves tend to extinguish many of the vicious (that is to say, anti-natural) impulses of the present generation. But vice and sin are, in many respects, merely relative terms to knowledge. To whom much is given, from him much will be expected; and there may be quite as much evil in one age, in relation to its opportunities, as in another.

I do not assert that the above represents the general view taken by Socialist thinkers of the future evolution of society, and its individual components. Few care to look so far ahead; nor, indeed, would it be profitable or advisable for those who do to utter their ideas broadcast among mixed audiences, or to publish them in their militant Socialist organs. As Socialists, they address themselves to the mass of their average-thinking fellow-citizens, and find it a sufficiently hard task to impress the latter with these fundamental economic truths upon the acceptance of which the most necessary, immediate work of the movement depends. But I do assert that the chief writers and expounders of the different schools of Modern Socialism agree in looking forward to future results far transcending the economic domain. No student of the question who has attended lectures of the educational class delivered by the leaders of the English Socialist groups, or who has acquainted himself with the higher views and aspirations published in the text-books, and in English, French, or German papers and magazines,* will deny this. The economic revolution is, to the more serious thinkers in the

* Let me take this opportunity of naming a few short works, pamphlets, and periodicals, treating the Socialist question from other aspects besides that of simple economic justice.

Text-Books, etc. :-

Hyndman and Morris's "Summary of the Principles of Socialism." (Modern Press, 13, Paternoster Row.)

Grönlund's "Co-operative Commonwealth." English Edition, by G. Bernard Shaw. (Modern Press.)

Edward Carpenter's "England's Ideal." (Swan Sonnenschein and Co.)

Edward Carpenter's "Towards Democracy."

Maurice Adam's "Ethics of Social Reform."

Krapotkin's "Appeal to the Young." (Modern Press.)

W. Morris's "Art and Socialism." (Reeves, 185, Fleet Street.)

Periodicals :-

"The Commonweal." Weekly. Revolutionary Collectivism and Communism. (Socialist League Offices, 13, Farringdon Road.)

"Freedom." Monthly. Communistic Anarchism. (Leaflet Press, 19, Cursitor Street, Chancery Lane.)

"To-day." Monthly. Socialism in general. (Reeves, 185, Fleet Street, E.C.)

"The Christian Socialist." Monthly. (Reeves, 185, Fleet Street.)

"Brotherhood." Monthly. (Reeves, 185, Fleet Street.)

"La Revue Socialiste." Monthly. Socialism in general. (B. Malon, 8, Rue des Martyrs, Paris.)

The above are all short and low-priced.

movement, merely a stepping-stone to the physical, intellectual, and moral regeneration of man and society.

An ideal of "Brotherhood" which "begins and ends in physical existence" is certainly not a fair description of the Socialists' ideal. Indeed, the very words employed carry the refutation of their intended application. When we are speaking of persons allied for some purely material and either bad or indifferently moral object, such as the construction of a road, the consumption of a dinner, stock exchange "operations," house-breaking, robbery, and swindling, political party victories, and the spoils of office, we may call them "bands," "gangs," "syndicates," "groups," or "parties," etc., but we should not think of calling them "brotherhoods," unless in the jocular and ironical sense. Socialism, on the contrary, like Theosophy and the higher religions, creates such bonds of spiritual intimacy between its disciples as demand warmer and closer terms, like "brotherhood," "comradeship," and "solidarity." Socialism, when completely grasped, rises in the hearts of its disciples to the rank of a religion, and thus justifies the half-mystic naturalism of some of its poetry and oratory. Socialists may already be said to constitute a great Universal Church, *minus* dogmas and priestcraft—undesirable appendages which, let us hope, we may never be cursed with!

I cannot refrain from quoting here a few sentences from the end of the twelfth chapter of Grönlund's "Co-operative Commonwealth," which shows how near to the Theosophic knowledge even an agnostic Socialist can be carried in his speculations. Discussing the religion of the New Order, he says: "The thought of being alive somewhere a thousand years hence is so pleasant, and life—bounded by the cradle and the grave—so futile, that mankind will probably cling to their belief in immortality, possibly reconciling it with their intelligence by setting up some distinction between personal identity and the memory of the transitory circumstances of our physical life, and holding that the former persists with alternate consciousness and oblivion, as in this life, whilst the latter vanishes. The religion of the future is likely, in our opinion, to be a form of belief in a Will of the Universe. Our own nature suggests this; evolution illustrates it; and all existing forms of thought have in common the conception of a Supreme Will as Providence for humanity, though not for the individual, entering into vital relations with the individual only through humanity as the mediator, and commanding the interdependence of mankind. Religion may thus be elevated from a narrow personal relation between the individual and his maker into a social relation between humanity and its destiny."

The attitude of Socialism towards the various religions existing in

different countries, whether orthodox "State" religions or unorthodox or "Dissenting," is one of supreme tolerance. State subvention and protection to any form of religion would, of course, be withdrawn by the Social Commonwealth, but religious persecution of any kind would be equally conspicuous by its absence. Ecclesiastical corporations would probably not be allowed to occupy land or pursue industries under any different conditions than those which were permitted to ~~other corporations~~; but this would be the only form of restriction to which religious sects would be subjected. Thus Mormonism and unpopular and even charlatanesque creeds might be allowed greater liberty than in America or any other "civilized" State under the Old Order. The influence of the State under the New Order would be positive rather than negative or restrictive. "The Eternal No" would not be heard so incessantly as it is now. The sphere of the State would be confined, so far as possible, to the administration (or rather regulation*) of the business of the country, and the education of the young. The latter would, no doubt, include a great deal more than it does at present; the physical, æsthetic, and moral (in the sense of *social*) education of the children would be provided for quite as carefully as the purely intellectual. At the same time, as the object of such education would be to produce, or rather assist Nature in producing, healthy, helpful, and self-respecting men and women—good citizens of this world—and not to instil any doctrines as to past or future existences, or duties having special reference thereto, it would be purely secular in its character. The *basis* of morality would not be defined either as religious or as utilitarian. Morality itself, or, as some would prefer to term it, *sociality*, would be instilled into the minds and hearts of the children very much as in the "well-bred" families of to-day notions of honour and "gentlemanly" or "lady-like" conduct are instilled: notions and sentiments which probably exercise quite as important influences for good or evil on the morals of the present generation, among the "upper" or privileged classes, as any religious principles. Social honour, social solidarity, and finally human solidarity, would replace family honour, "clannishness," and patriotism. Social life would replace in importance, without necessarily destroying, family life.

This social life of the Co-operative Commonwealth of the future will by no means entail the dull uniformity of habits and character which some, who have been frightened by the bugbear of *equality*, imagine.

* The direct administration of the various departments of production, distribution, exchange (except with foreign countries), locomotion, etc., would probably be left, in a populous country like Great Britain, partly in the hands of democratically constituted trade corporations, partly in those of provincial, county, and communal administrations.

Artificial equality is, of course, neither possible nor desirable. The constituent elements of the new society, ethnological, religious, intellectual, and otherwise, will necessarily remain as varied and unequal—for a generation or so, at any rate—as they are now; but they will be better assorted, better synthesized and harmonized. Imperfect types, intellectual or psychical, and crude beliefs, will not be crushed out under the New Order; but they will simply die a natural death like bed-sores on a convalescent patient. The object of Socialists, as distinguished from Absolutists and pseudo-Socialists, like Bismarck and some of our legislators at home, is to give Nature a free hand, or rather, having studied her tendencies, to assist and co-operate with her; that of the Absolutists and Authoritarians is either to imprison and “suppress” her, or, by way of variety, to put her in harness and lash her forward along a road which she had no intention of taking. Some of these Absolutists call themselves Revolutionists, but the revolution which they would prepare is one which Nature would resent and revenge herself upon by kicking over the traces in a bloody reaction. Such revolutionists are far from numerous in the ranks of modern Socialism; when found, they generally turn out to be *agents provocateurs*.

The genuine Social Revolutionist leaves the dangerous and immoral weapons of compulsion, provocation and suppression to the enemy—the weapons he advocates are political and economic liberty and education. Compulsion and suppression he would only apply to the idlers, the thieves, the violent, and the dissolute—those ill-favoured products of a chaotic and corrupt civilization. These he would coerce only so far as may be necessary for the safety and welfare of the rest. If the Social Revolution cannot be effected without violence, that will be, not because Socialists try to force the changes they wish to realize upon Society before it is ripe for them, but because the class or party in power, in its own selfish determination to suppress them, takes the initiative in violence.

This leads me to say a few words about Mr. Harbottle's objection that we Socialists have such “an innate hatred of domination,” coupled with the astounding assertion that “we are prepared to substitute for the *existing* domination of *intelligence* (the italics are mine), that of mere numbers.” The latter assertion I hardly care to reply to seriously. Anyone who knows how, even in the most democratic countries of the present *régime*, like France and America, the poor candidate is handicapped, however intelligent, will agree with me that the field of popular selection is virtually limited to such intelligence as is coupled with wealth. Now, such intelligence is not necessarily of the highest order—often quite the contrary. Socialists, at any rate, mistrust it very much as a “dominating” force in politics. Moreover, Mr. Harbottle is

perfectly correct in the first part of his statement—Socialists *have* “an innate hatred” of “domination” of *any* kind. The only authority which they agree to recognise is that of the freely-elected official or administrator during his term of office, or until dismissed. The present direct electoral methods, by which one man may be chosen by ten or twenty thousand to “represent” them in an assembly several hundred miles off, would not be followed. Bourgeois Parliamentarism will die with the transitional civilization which has produced it. The Social Commonwealth will be both an aristocracy and a democracy in the best sense of those words—the people will select the best men and women for the time being, and according to their own collective judgment, to administer their business, and will pay them fairly for their work; but will take good care that they do not become their masters. Domination, indeed, strictly speaking, will be impossible under any ideal Socialist *régime*, whether Collectivist or Anarchist. But when from this premise, *viz.*, our hatred of domination, Mr. Harbottle argues that no Socialist could accept a “spiritual hierarchy,” he is quite beside the mark. A spiritual hierarchy, so long as it remains that, and becomes nothing less, cannot possibly become a domination, for it is only submitted to *voluntarily*, by persons who have made up their minds to the divine character of its authority; nor is this submission enforced by physical or spiritual threats. A papacy is, of course, quite a different thing, but I presume Mr. Harbottle does not suggest that Theosophists must subject themselves to such an institution. If so, I fear I am still far from becoming a perfect Theosophist. For the rest, as I have said already, citizens of the Social Commonwealth will be every bit as free to submit themselves to whatever spiritual control their consciences dictate, as in the freest of the “free countries” of capitalism.

Of all the movements of the present day to which thinking minds are being attracted in large numbers, Socialism is probably that which exercises the most educative and expansive effect on the character, both moral and intellectual. Of course I am placing Theosophy outside the reckoning; it is a study for which very few minds are at present matured. But Socialism, in breaking down the barriers of prejudice and of class or intellectual conventionalisms, will, in this way, if in no other, prepare many for that further revolution in thought, and in the aspirations of the soul, which is implied by the term Theosophy. I maintain as I have suggested—without attempting to argue it out—that Socialism will be found by those who study it impartially to be part, if not the most important part *for the present*, of the general Pantheistic movement, which will culminate in the regeneration (in the highest sense of the word) of humanity at large on this planet. I do not read

“Light on the Path” in the exclusive and dogmatic sense in which Mr. Harbottle construes (as it seems to me) a certain passage in it, although there is no book that I have ever read which brings conviction to me of *so much* truth in so small a material compass. After all, no faith can be higher than the truth, and if I have succeeded in this very imperfect and, I fear, ill-connected article, in putting others in the way of getting at more of it than they would have done otherwise, regarding the relation of Modern Socialism to Theosophy, and in dispelling some errors regarding the former, I shall not have written them in vain.

J. BRAILSFORD BRIGHT, M.A., Oxon.

PRACTICAL WORK FOR THEOSOPHISTS.

EVERY person who enters the Theosophical Society is bound to accept its first principle, the assertion of the Universal Brotherhood of Man ; but it is to be feared that with large numbers of the Fellows the profession remains an empty phrase, too like the “dearly beloved brethren” of the Churches, without bearing on life or effect on conduct. No antithesis can be discovered which is sharper than that between the principle of Brotherhood and the Class-and-Mammon-worship of modern society ; no links of true fraternity bind together the dwellers in palaces and the dwellers in slums ; no golden bands of sympathy unite the wealthy and the poor. Yet Altruism remains only a name so long as it is severed from personal service of Humanity, and Theosophy is merely a new form of glorified selfishness for those who “take it up” from curiosity, or from the desire to know, merely that the knowledge may be a personal possession and powers be attained for the sake of wielding them. At the great gate of the Temple of Knowledge stands the Guardian, and if to his question : “Why dost thou desire to know and to achieve?” there comes any answer but : “That I may the better serve Humanity,” the candidate for admission should be sent back to his spelling book, until he has learned the alphabet of Altruism.

Let us suppose that all the latent powers of the Human Intellect and Will could suddenly be developed in the men and the women around us as by the touch of a magician's wand, and that they could step forth into the world clothed with supersensual knowledge and power ; what would

it avail, save to make this world a worse hell of contending passions than it is to-day, in which would rage Titanic contests of selfishness and greed, rendered the more horrible by the mightier powers of those engaged in the fratricidal struggle? Not until the brute in us is starved out of life; not until the lower self is slain and only the voice of the Higher Self is heard; not until personal desire has been lost in the desire for humanity; not until all ambition is dead, save the ambition to serve; not until this point is reached can power be safely trusted in human hands. Those who lightly enter the Theosophical Society, imagining that thereby they will at once spring into the exercise of the higher human capabilities, have to learn that the capacity to lead the Higher Life must precede the capacity to wield the higher powers. Hence the long probation insisted on for every candidate; the deep study which ensures that knowledge shall precede Power; the tests which bar the way towards the higher planes of being. And since character grows out of habits, and habits out of acts often repeated, there is no better school for forming habits of unselfishness, no surer way of moulding the selfless character, than by doing personal acts of service to our brothers and sisters struggling in the sad environment made for them by our modern civilization.

First must come the real honest feeling of equality, not the verbal profession, but the inner conviction. Unless this exists, all work among the poor tends to become demoralising both to helper and to helped, breeding self-complacency in the one and subserviency in the other. Every act must spring spontaneously from the brotherly relationship; so that aid, comfort, counsel, whenever given, shall be the free and loving gift of brother to brother, so that respect of the highest in the lowest shall breed self-respect, and charity, in rebecoming Love, shall purify and raise and not degrade. But, I repeat, the feeling of equality must be *real*, all social castes merging into the human brotherhood, so that there is no consciousness of difference whether speaking to prince or pauper, the man and the woman becoming everything and the rank nothing.

Then comes the cleansing of one's own life in its relations to those by whose labour we are fed and clothed and housed. Every article that we use embodies so much human labour, and if we use it, we are bound to render back for it due equivalent of our own labour. If this be not done, we are robbing instead of exchanging, soiling our lives by theft. And here I speak to Theosophists belonging to the "middle" and "upper" classes, for the poor, already crushed by labour, are forced to buy what they need for subsistence at the lowest rate at which they can obtain it. This is not so among the richer, and they are bound to see that they do not vicariously sweat the workers by their purchases of "cheap goods."

In this matter women are the worst sinners, buying gowns and other articles of clothing at prices which they know cannot cover the cost of material and a fair wage to the needlewoman. If they would personally employ the needlewoman instead of buying her work from the shop, they would not dare to pay her the starvation wage which they pay her through the hands of the middlemen; and they would not then be wearing garments soiled perhaps by the harlotry which has been fled to for a piece of bread. If they cannot manage this personal employment, they can easily ascertain who are fair and who are unfair employers by writing for information to Miss Clementina Black, 198, High Holborn, London, W.C., who has exerted herself to form a Consumers' League of persons ashamed to live by sweating their neighbours. It is hardly necessary to add that the personal life of the Theosophist should be frugal, simple, and free from luxury, both for the sake of his own inner development, and in order that he may live honestly, not taking more than he gives.

The personal life thus purified, there remains the active service due to our fellows. Each must here judge his own capacities and opportunities, but there are two or three lines of work in which painstaking and cultured men and women are much wanted at the present time. For instance, some might serve as managers of our Board Schools, attending to the remission of fees, supervising the tone and method of instruction, noting if the children are properly fed, organizing free meals for those in need, and giving to the teachers the sympathy and friendliness which they so sorely lack in their arduous and responsible labour. There are openings for useful and far-reaching service in this line of work second, perhaps, to none, bearing as it does on the training of the citizens of the future as well as on lightening the burdens that press so heavily to-day.

Women, with leisure on their hands, can find a way of using that leisure in the service of others by writing to Allen D. Graham, 18, Buckingham Street, Strand. Mr. Graham, some time ago, finding that invalided children were constantly being sent from the hospitals to poor, overcrowded, and often dirty homes, suggested that kind-hearted folk might each take charge of two or three of such children, visiting them, playing with them, taking them out, and, in fact, generally "mothering" them. These little ones, ailing and feeble, suffer terribly in this rough hurrying world, and much pain might be saved, much pleasure given, by a little sacrifice of time and trouble.

Another form of service, open to the wealthier, is buying shares in companies whose servants are notoriously overworked, and then attending the shareholders' meetings and insisting on shorter hours, higher

wages, and better treatment all round. The dividends from the shares can be paid into the Union fund of the employees where a Trade Union exists; where there is no Trade Union, no more useful work can be done than urging the men or women to unite and aiding them in the first uphill steps of organization.

These suggestions may serve as examples of the kind of service which is crying aloud to be done, of practical profession of the Brotherhood of Man. I am not putting them forward as remedies for the evils inseparable from the present order of Society. As a Socialist, I know but too well that all such work as this can only act as palliative, not as cure; none the less will it lighten some of the darkness around us, and, in the absence of the sun, farthing dials are better than unbroken Cimmerian gloom.

It is obvious that, in addition to such dutiful Service of Man as I have been glancing at, there are other duties incumbent on every member of the T. S. Those who can use their pens should answer objections or expose slanders made in the columns of our ordinary press; most editors will put in a tersely-written clear reply to attacks made in their papers. And all should study Theosophical teachings, both for their own culture and for the assistance of others. It is not enough to set our own feet on the Path; as soon as we are able we should guide thitherward the feet of others; and in order that we may be competent for the task, we must study, study, study. The subtle metaphysics of Theosophy will attract but the few; few, again, are likely to feel the call to climb the rugged path to those heights on which the Masters sit serene. Neither its philosophy nor its possibilities of growth will avail much to recommend it to the superficial thinkers or to the luxurious livers of our day. But the sight of noble lives, strenuously and selflessly working for human good, battling against poverty and sorrow, the twin-daughters of Ignorance, these will justify Theosophy in the eyes of the world, proving that self-devotion can exist apart from superstition, that clear-eyed Intellect can walk hand-in-hand with the Love that saves.

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