

LABOUR IDEAL SERIES.

FROM SERFDOM TO SOCIALISM.*

"If, therefore, the choice were to be made between Communism with all its chances, and the present state of society with all its sufferings and injustices; if the institution of private property necessarily carried with it as a consequence that the produce of labour should be apportioned as we now see it, almost in inverse ratio to the labour—the largest portions to those who have never worked at all, the next largest to those whose work is almost nominal, and so on in a descending scale, the remuneration dwindling as the work grows harder and more disagreeable, until the most fatiguing and exhausting bodily labour cannot count with certainty on being able to earn even the necessities of life—if this or Communism were the alternative, all the difficulties, great or small, of Communism would be but as dust in the balance."—*John Stuart Mill.*

The above oft-quoted words admirably summarises our attitude toward what to-day is known as "Socialism," amongst whose adherents the common enemies of both are prone to include us. If we thought that Socialism offered the only, or even the best, way out of the present iniquitous, corrupt and corrupting state of things, its dangers and difficulties "would be but as dust in the balance," and we, together with all those who have embraced the Georgian philosophy and the Single Tax faith, would necessarily be Socialists and enthusiastic advocates of Socialism. "That the useful classes must be made free to enjoy the full produce resulting from their labours," as the well-known author of the little book now before us expresses it, is, indeed, an end upon which all earnest social reformers are agreed. What necessarily divides them into separate, though for immediately practical purposes not necessarily antagonistic, camps, is not "the contemplation of petty details," but fundamental differences of diagnosis of the real root cause of the dire social ills both equally earnestly desire to see ended, and consequently as to the steps by which they can most speedily and most effectively be removed. The one honestly holds, to use the words of our author, that "Socialism represents a desirable set of principles which, if acted on, would tend to the further development and improvement of the human race"; the other finds itself compelled to reject this view.

Some of the principal causes of this difference of opinion may be revealed in our review of the attractive little book now before us, in which, however, there is so much with which we are in entire sympathy and agreement that we could not, even if we would, criticise harshly those points with which we are forced to differ. We thoroughly agree with Mr. Hardie that—

"Unless the social quagmire of poverty can be cleansed, its foul miasma will poison the blood of the body politic and produce decay and death."

That—"No law can give freedom to a people which is dependent on some power or authority outside themselves [even though it be the House of Land-Lords] for the necessities of life. The owners of the means of life can dictate the terms upon which all who are not owners are permitted to live."

That—"It is not the State which holds the workers in bondage, it is the private monopoly of those means of life without which they cannot live; and until they make these means of life the common property and inheritance of all, they can never hope to escape from their bondage."

* "From Serfdom to Socialism." By J. Keir Hardie. Publisher: George Allen, London. Price 1s.

That—"The property question is the issue which is creating a new political cleavage in the State," as well as in the ranks of equally earnest social reformers.

That—"Every relationship in life is vitiated by the false basis upon which society rests."

That—"It would be an easy task to show that Communism is a form of social economy very closely akin to the principles set forth in the Sermon on the Mount."

That—"Only by taking away the power to exploit" "can we ensure permanent freedom for all."

That—"The sex problem is at bottom a Labour problem," or, rather, "an economic problem."

That—"Unrest and discontent are the heralds of coming change—the forerunners of reform."

That—"The conditions attendant upon poverty in these latter days are more demoralising than even before. In the less complex life of former days the poor were more akin to other classes, and better able to help themselves. In the great vortex of modern life they are almost completely shut off from human fellowship. The stress and strain are so great, the organisation of society so anarchic, that once a man gets down into the depths, his chance of rising again are exceedingly remote."

That—"In our own country the boundaries of freedom have been widening with the progress of the ages."

... The modern workman is theoretically the equal, in the eyes of the law, of every other class.

... But his task is not yet finished; the long drawn out struggle is not yet over. There is one more battle to be fought, one more fortress to be assailed, ere he stands within the charmed circle of perfect equality. He has yet to overcome 'property' and win economic freedom."

And, finally, we entirely agree with the contention that—

"Were the modern workman master and owner of capital and of land, he would no longer be at the mercy of a blind, bloodless force outside himself."

... When he has made property his servant, not his master, he will literally have put all his enemies under his feet."

Where, then, do we disagree with him? Solely as to the real enemy to be overcome, and consequently as to the best, most simple, most effective, and most beneficial means by which the modern workers may make "property their servant, not their master." At the very commencement of his attractive book, page 30, Mr. Keir Hardie points out that "the workers are realising that private property is the enemy they have to encounter." With all due deference we must admit that this seems to us one of those dangerous half-truths which it is the most sacred duty of every instructed social reformer to refute. Property, in what? In things which labour has produced, and which, if only it has access to nature, it can reproduce in quantities sufficient to satisfy the requirements of all? Or property in those natural sources, forces, and opportunities which form, in truth, "those means of life without which we could not live," to which Mr. Hardie so eloquently refers in the passage above quoted? Our author persists in drawing no differences between these two very different things. And this is the fundamental point which separates us and those who think with us from him and those who think with and follow him. It is this fundamental difference which accounts for all our differences, and which leads us and them to such very different conclusions as to the one true path toward social justice and economic freedom which it is our common aim to promote according to our lights. We realise to the full how the extension of the institution of private property to land, to nature, enslaves, impoverishes, degrades, and corrupts all within its sphere of influence. We know how adequately it explains the fact, again to use our author's words, that—"Our civilisation rests on a Helot class which is compelled to give its whole time and talent to the owners of 'property'."

in exchange for a precarious supply of the barest necessities of life." But we have carefully studied Mr. Hardie's book, and countless other similar books, without being able to discover on what grounds they venture to accuse the institution of private property in things produced by man of being guilty of such effects.

Hence it is that we cannot agree that what is known as Socialism presents either a new or a true "conception of society or basis upon which to build up the life of the individual and of the State." Quite the contrary; it seems to us but a reversion to the oldest and crudest conceptions of social life, which demands the sacrifice of the sacred rights of the individual or minority to the requirements, real or imaginary, of the majority or the community. But, as everybody attentive to the subject well knows, it is the minority, not the majority, who first formulate and espouse newer, broader, and truer views in every field of thought. Hence it is that we cannot enthusiastically welcome, as "tending to the further development and improvement of the human race," any school of thought ignoring the equal claim of a minority to opportunities to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. As Mr. Keir Hardie himself warns his readers—"Hunger is a much more potent weapon than any form of penal enactment for bringing an insubordinate member of the community to subjection, and under any conceivable form of voluntary co-operation"; as also of enforced Socialism or Communism, "the individual who puts himself in opposition to the clearly expressed will of his fellows," in other words, to the majority, "would fare no better than he does at present."

A benevolent despotism, or a benevolent all-powerful State, which Socialism seems to us to involve, is again based upon the oldest and crudest conceptions of the function of Governments, and has ever been the ideal of all—Aristocrats, Theocrats, and Bureaucrats—who would keep the people in subjection and shape them to their will. But, no matter under what specious pleas it may be advocated, it can have no attractions and never beguile those who have once adequately realised what Democracy means and what Democracy demands. As Keir Hardie reminds us—"In our own country the boundaries of freedom have been widening with the progress of the ages." Let us, then, follow it further and trust it fully, and, therefore, refuse to sanction any attempt to limit and enchain it, even though we ourselves be asked to forge its fetters.

L. H. B.

COMING EVENTS.

2nd October.—Huddersfield, Victoria Hall, Mr. Alex. Ure, K.C., M.P., Solicitor-General for Scotland; Mr. J. H. Whitley, M.P., and Mr. R. L. Outhwaite, Alderman Willans, J.P., presiding.

4th October.—Leeds Coliseum Hall.—Mr. Alexander Ure, K.C., M.P., Solicitor-General for Scotland, and Mr. Charles Trevelyan, M.P., under the auspices of the United Committee, Councillor Connellan, J.P., Secretary Leeds Trades Council, presiding.

26th October.—Saltaire, Yorks Victoria Hall.—Mr. Ure and Mr. Percy Illingworth, M.P., under the auspices of the United Committee and the Yorkshire Branch of the League, James Roberts, Esq., J.P., presiding.

15th November.—Partick (Lanarkshire) Burgh Hall.—Under the auspices of the Scottish League and the local branch of the Young Scots Society—Mr. Ure and Mr. J. Dundas White, M.P.

December 9th.—Chesterfield, Stephenson Memorial Hall.—Mr. Ure.

29th January, 1908.—Mr. Winston Churchill, M.P., will address a meeting to be held in Newcastle-on-Tyne under the auspices of the United Committee and the Tyneside Branch of the League.

Greenock.—Mr. Ure will address a meeting in the Town Hall. Date not fixed.

19th October.—Bradford.—Mr. Crompton L. Davies will address a meeting at the Bradford Liberal Club. Representatives from neighbouring Clubs and Societies will be present.

24th October.—Croydon.—Local conference on the Taxation of Land Values, under the auspices of the Croydon Branch of the English League.

REPORTS.

Mr. Francis Neilson had a successful series of open-air meetings in the Potteries District (Staffordshire) last month under the auspices of the United Committee. The first meeting was held at Smallthorne with about 60 present; at Talke over 150; at Kids Grove a fine audience of about 400. Good audiences at Mustall, Chesterton and Silverdale, with Mr. Wedgwood, M.P., presiding. At Stoke, one of the places fixed, it was not possible to hold a meeting, as it rained in torrents. At Fenton the weather was wretched, but Mr. Neilson spoke to an audience of quite 100. At this meeting a local Socialist took the chair, and a member of the S.D.F. moved the resolution, which was carried unanimously. At Longton there was quite an audience, and a most successful meeting. About 60 were present at the Harpfield meeting, Mr. Wedgwood in the chair. The closing meeting of the series was held at Newcastle-under-Lyme. A large audience turned out, and the proceedings were most successful. At all the meetings resolutions were passed urging the Prime Minister to introduce next session Land Valuation Bills for Scotland, England, and Wales.

CHESTERFIELD.—Mr. Edward M'Hugh addressed four open-air meetings last month under the auspices of the United Committee. The arrangements were undertaken by local supporters, who are desirous that Mr. M'Hugh should come again on a similar mission.

LEEDS.—The arrangements for the public demonstration in the Coliseum are now proceeding in a most satisfactory manner. Temporary premises have been opened in a shop in a main thoroughfare—15a Park Lane—and Mr. Skirrow and Mr. Henry George M'Hugh are installed here, and are kept busy day and night selling literature and answering questions. It would cheer the heart of the chief of our "Publication Department" to witness the fine display of books and pamphlets in the large front window, and to see the crowds feasting their eyes on the tempting half-crown bargains going at 1s. There has been nothing like it in the movement since the Glasgow Bazaar. In the main street a sort of Commissioner has been rigged out with a Land Values band round his hat and a up-to-date basket of pamphlets with a flaming coloured advertisement of their use for excessive rating, housing and unemployment. The passers-by stop next, and the anxious inquirer proceeds to the shop to ask for something on "The attitude of the Lords on the question?" or "How it would effect the man who has sunk his all in three houses in a back part of the town?" There is quite a commotion at Leeds, and the coming of the Solicitor-General for Scotland is announced on placards you can observe at the corner of the next street or at a range of a hundred yards away.

HUDDERSFIELD AND SALTAIRE.—The arrangements for the meetings at these towns are well in hand. The local Press and a plentiful supply of posters maintain the interest of the public and the local promoters of the meeting are confident of success.

LIVERPOOL DISTRICT.—"Land Values," and all the latest pamphlets issued by the Publication Department, can now be obtained in Liverpool from Mr. Andrew Scott, 37a Shaw Street, and Reid's News Agency, District Bank Buildings, Water Street (opposite the Town Hall).