

decency, and cleanliness as necessaries? If you do, what say you to the barbarism of Glasgow, of Liverpool, of London, and of Manchester? Come, will you tell me how Socialism is going to ruin Ancoats, or lower the moral standard of Whitechapel, or debase the ideal of Black Country life? It will be time enough for our statesmen to despise the "necessaries of life" when they have made it possible for the people to get them.

Error No. 6, that Socialism would encourage laziness, I shall deal with in a future chapter.

CHAPTER XIX.

SOCIALISM AND SLAVERY.

Then let us be thankful to Jules
 And Bil for the way they behaved,
 For though wages be small
 There's *employment* for all,
 And "the freedom of contract" is saved.

Thus free competition remains,
 A blessing to England and France;
 And the Communist schemes
 Are rejected as dreams,
 So that every rogue has a chance.

—*The Clarion.*

The common misconceptions of Socialism are most perverse and foolish. Mr. Herbert Spencer wrote an article called "The Coming Slavery." I think he is responsible for the much-quoted opinion that Socialism would result in a more odious form of slavery than any the world has yet known.

Clearly there are two things which Mr. Herbert Spencer, like most of our critics, has failed to understand. One of these things is Socialism; the other is the condition of existing society.

I deny that Socialism would result in any form of slavery at all; and I assert that a most odious form of slavery exists at present in this so-called free country. Let us see.

First as to Socialism. Mr. Spencer's idea appears to be that under Socialism the State would compel men to work against their will, or to work at occupations uncongenial to them.

This is a mistake. The State would not compel any man to work. It would only enable all men to work, and to live in peace and comfort by their labour.

If a man did not choose to work he would not be coerced. He could either do his fair share of the work of the community in return for his fair share of the wealth, or he could decline to work.

But if he declined to work he would certainly have to starve, or to leave the State.

Now I want to point out to you, before I go any further, that as things are at present some men live luxuriously and do no work, many men do a great deal of work and live wretchedly, and nearly three-quarters of a million of men who are willing to work can get no work to do.

To hear people talk about slavery under Socialism, you would suppose we had freedom now. Robert Ingersoll says:—

Some of the best and purest of our race have advocated what is known as Socialism. . . . Socialism seems to me to be one of the worst possible forms of slavery. . . . Nothing would so utterly paralyse all the forces, all the splendid ambitions and aspirations that tend now to the civilisation of man. . . . Socialism destroys the family and sacrifices the liberties of all. If the Government is to provide work it must decide for the worker what he must do, &c. Is it possible to conceive of a despotism beyond this? The human race cannot afford to exchange its liberty for any possible comfort.

The human race cannot afford to exchange its liberty for any possible comfort! But the human race has not got any liberty to exchange. The human race, at least the great majority, are *slaves*.

But ask yourself, what liberty of choice is left to you.

Suppose you are out of work, can you have work for the asking? No. But under Socialism you could always have work. Is *that* a proof of slavery? Suppose under Socialism you were told that you must work or starve! Would that be any more despotic treatment than the treatment you get now? Tell your present employers that you do not wish to work, and see what the alternative will be. You must work or starve now. The difference between present conditions, and the conditions of Socialism, are that you

now work long hours for a bare existence, whereas, in a Socialistic State you would work short hours for a life of honour and comfort.

The Socialistic State would not compel any man to work; it would prevent him from living on the work of others. It would organise the industries, production and distribution of the community, and would then say to the citizen "If you would enjoy the benefits and share the wealth of this commonwealth you must also obey the laws and share the labour." Surely that is just. But in no case can it be twisted to mean slavery, for the man who did not like the conditions could refuse them, just as he can now.

But note that other statement of Mr. Ingersoll's:—

If the Government is to provide work it must decide for the worker what he must do.

Must it? Why?

At present the capitalist finds work, but he does not decide what we must do. He cannot decide, or he would.

So when the State found work it would not decide what each man must do.

You will ask me how a Socialist State would apportion the work. I ask *you* how the work is apportioned *now*.

You have a son, say a lad of fourteen, and wish to put him to a trade. You ask him his choice. He says he would like to be a cabinet-maker. You apply at the shops in your own town and you find that trade is bad, or that the allowed number of apprentices is made up. So you get the boy work as an engineer or a painter.

That is to say, your boy can choose his trade *subject to the demand for labour of certain kinds*. If all the boys wanted to be engineers they could not all get work at that trade.

These conditions would exist under Socialism. The State or the municipality would need a certain number of plumbers and a certain number of painters. If more boys asked to be painters than the State needed to do its painting, some of those boys would have to take other work. Where does the slavery come in?

Robert Ingersoll is considered a very able man, and Herbert Spencer enjoys the reputation of being a great thinker.

What have these famous men been doing with their eyes? How have they contrived to commit the egregious blunder of supposing that men have free choice of occupation now? How many men do you know, John Smith, who are working at the trade of their choice or living where and how they please?

Let us return to your boy of fourteen. Suppose, instead of choosing to be a cabinet-maker, he said, "I want to be a doctor!" You would laugh at him. Why?

Because it is absurd for a weaver's son to ask to be a doctor. Why?

Because it costs a lot of money to become a doctor. And, once more, why? Because a doctor has a great deal to learn, and education is *dear*.

So though your son wishes to be a doctor, though he might possess great talent for the work, he must go and be a candlestick-maker instead, for you are too poor to give him his choice.

But under Socialism education would be free. It would be free to *all*. Therefore the competition for doctorships would be equal. It would not be what it is now—a close thing for the privileged classes. So your boy would have as good a chance as any other.

"Ah," but you will say, "under Socialism *all* the boys would want to be doctors and artists and writers." Very likely. And at present all the boys want to be "gentlemen," but very few of them get their wish, and many of them have to be beggars or thieves.

Under Socialism any boy who had the industry and talent might qualify himself to get a diploma. Of course, when he had got it, he might not get an appointment as one of the medical men for his town.

But I understand that there are at present a good many doctors with no practice.

There is no greater blunder possible than the blunder of supposing that in this country at the present time every man may follow the work of his choice. It is a ridiculous error.

To read Mr. Bradlaugh, Mr. Ingersoll, and Mr. Spencer, you would think that things are so well ordered now that all kinds of work must fall to the men best fitted to do it.

Writers and painters have to write and paint what they can *sell*; provided they can get a chance to write and paint at all.

Take my own case. Here I am, after being forty-two years a free man, in a free country, obliged to confess that I have never yet succeeded in doing the kind of work I have wanted to do.

Turn your eyes to trade. There are two carpet factories in a town. Another man sets up in that trade. What happens? He may be a good man and a clever man; and he may make better carpets than the other firms, but unless he is very rich they will ruin him by selling below cost price in order to retain the trade in their own hands.

Or suppose there are two papers in a town and a rival paper is started. What will happen?

The new paper may be a much better paper than the old ones, but unless its proprietor is a rich man it cannot live. Why?

Because there is such a thing as a boycott. The proprietors of the established papers will send around to the news-agents and say, "If you sell the *Comet* I will take away the agency for the *Fog Horn*," and "If you sell the *Comet* I shall get fresh agents for the *Welsher*."

Now suppose the agent is poor, as most agents are, and suppose he is selling both those papers and clearing ten shillings a week on the sale. Is it likely that he will risk the ten shillings for the sake of selling a good paper which may not pay him one shilling, or may not live a month?

Do you call that agent a free agent? Do you mean to say that the would-be proprietor of the *Comet* is a free man, or that he can do what work he pleases?

Under present conditions, rascality and money can always overreach honesty and brains.

I am not talking fine-spun theory now, like that of Robert Ingersoll. I am telling you *facts* and arguing from experience.

About a year ago I met the manager of a weekly London paper. He told me that he was trying to establish a circulation in the provinces, but that the local papers had boycotted him. And then he said, "We are making some headway, and have got a small sale; but every copy of our

paper we sell costs us *four shillings* to dispose of." You will observe that the merit of the papers had nothing to do with the case. The London paper was certainly better than its local rivals. But the locals had blocked the agents and lowered their prices.

Talk about slavery! Freedom of contract! Under your much-glorified freedom of contract, how many contracts are freely made? Under your vaunted liberty of the Individual, how many individuals have any liberty at all? At this present day in this fine country the bulk of the people are slaves. They are slaves *not* to a wise, beneficent, and popular Government, but to a ring of greedy, grasping fools; a coterie of rich barbarians—who would boil down the last nightingale if they thought his bones would serve to dye yarn; who would choke up the last well if they had no place handy in which to shoot their alkali dust, and would cover the last rood of sward with ashes, if they thought there was no hope of grinding the said ashes with sewer slime to make mortar for the people's houses. "Can any one imagine a despotism more terrible" than the regulation of work by Government? I think so. I think I could find it. But I have no need to look. See; it is here, ready to my hand.

It is here, in a letter, long kept by me, a sample of many I constantly receive:—

If you can sec your way to give us poor devils of silk dyers a word or two I am sure it would do us good. We work longer hours than any others in the trade in England, get less wages, and, for our lives, or rather our situations, dare not openly belong to a union. If we strike—as we did last summer—pressure is brought upon us by our wives and children (nearly all of whom have to work) being dismissed from their situations. If we write to the *Leek Times*—the best friend we poor dyers ever had—we are afraid to sign our names; and if we have a meeting it has to be kept a dead secret. In fact, it is not worth living to work under such circumstances, and as far as I can see the only union we shall ever get will be the union workhouse, and many of us are half way there now. Give us a word to strengthen the fearful and encourage the weak. Somebody must help us. We cannot help ourselves. We have been down so long that we don't know how to get up.

P.S.—For God's sake *do not mention my name*.

For God's sake, *do not mention my name.* What? It is no crime to write to a pressman and say, "I am not happy," or "I am ill-paid." It is not against the law to say, "We have no union." If a man trembles to hear his own name given with his own true statements, what becomes of the sacred "liberty of the individual"? Is *this* your liberty, then? Is this the liberty *we* "cannot sacrifice for any comfort"? Are these the noble aspirations and glorious ambitions that Socialism would trample out of life? Is this free England's free choice? When a free man fears to speak his own name? Surely there is *some* despotism even now extant.

But Mr. Ingersoll says, "The human race cannot afford to sell its liberty for any possible comfort." I have, I think, said enough to satisfy you that the human race have no liberty to sell, but I don't want you to suppose that Socialism is nothing nobler than a desire for comfort. We want better things than comfort. We want freedom and justice, and honour and education. Your individualist and utilitarian are the disciples of comfort. To their comfort and to their luxury all that is best and sweetest in the lives of the poor is sacrificed. *They* imagine that so long as the worker has enough to eat and drink he has all that he requires. The comfort they wot of is the comfort of the hog—an overfed stomach, a bed of straw, and a close and filthy sty. We Socialists ask that the people shall be held as something better than hogs. We ask that they shall be treated as men and women—and to men and women comfort is not the fulfilment of life.

The people need more than wages. They need *leisure*. They need culture. They need humane and rational amusement. They need the chance to exercise those "splendid ambitions and aspirations" about which our critic is eloquent.

I want to know why the collier and the weaver and the railway drudge and the silk dyer should be doomed to a dull and brutish round of labour—I will not call it work—and greasy stew, and bad beer, and straw mattress, and filthy slum? I want to know why the yahoo yelping of the free and easy should be considered recreation; and why the promotion to a head shuntership at 21s. should be counted as

high enough ambition? Tell me, why should not the best that art, and science, and literature, and music, and poetry, and the drama can do be placed at the disposal of the humblest workers? Why should not the factory girl be an educated lady? Why should the collier not be a cultured gentleman?

The answer is "Capitalism!" The exigencies of capitalism grind these people down, rob them of rest, of energy, of health, of food, of time—so that they have neither heart nor mind nor opportunity to become aught but drudges. Talk about "splendid ambitions and aspirations!" Such things now are for the fortunate few; but we want them for the many.

Beware of mistaking "what is understood as Socialism" for the genuine article. Genuine Socialism would make the collier into a gentleman. "What is understood as Socialism" could only make the gentleman into a collier. There is a difference.

CHAPTER XX.

INDUSTRY.

Nearly every problem of State policy and economy, as at present understood, and practised, consists in some device for persuading you labourers to go and dig up dinner for us reflective and æsthetic persons, who like to sit still, and think, or admire. So that when we get to the bottom of the matter, we find the inhabitants of this earth broadly divided into two great masses;—the peasant paymasters—spade in hand, original and imperial producers of turnips; and, waiting on them all round, a crowd of polite persons, modestly expectant of turnips, for some—too often theoretical—service.—*Ruskin.*

When Socialists complain of the misery of the poor they are often told by Pressmen, Parsons, and Politicians, that all the sufferings of the poor are due to their own vices and folly. Thus, a short time ago, the *Manchester Examiner and Times*, in reviewing a little book of mine, went out of its way to offer me a lesson in political economy, and announced that the misery of the masses was due "to sin, hereditary and acquired."

The *Examiner* implied, of course, that the misery of the people was due to their own sin.

This is the very reverse of the truth. The misery of the people is due to the sins, negligences, and ignorances of