

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## MINOR QUESTIONS.

Two ship-captains were wrangling together, when Captain A twitted Captain B with starving his crew.

"Come," retorted B, "yours is a proper ship, indeed. Why, I hear that the fore-castle mess had no mustard."

"Granted," replied A, "and I wish we may get some in time. But do not let that drive out of your mind the fact that your sailors have no beef."

MORAL: He who would remove the mote from his neighbour's eye, should first pluck the beam from his own.—*Clarion Fable.*

In this chapter I propose to answer a few of those questions which are so often put to Socialist writers and lecturers.

1. Under Socialism: What will you do with your loafers?

Before I answer this question allow me to offer a few hints to young Socialists. The opponents of Socialism appear to suppose that if they can suggest any difficulty, however trivial, which may arise in the working of our system, they have disposed of the whole matter. Very many ardent but inexperienced young Socialists fall into the error of trying to prove that Socialism and Heaven are the same thing.

Both sides should remember that Socialism is not offered as a perfect system of life, but only as very great improvement upon the system under which we now live.

The question, then, is not whether Socialism is the best thing man can conceive, but whether Socialism is better than our present method of life.

Therefore, when a critic asks a young Socialist whether a certain evil will exist under Socialism, let the Socialist immediately ask his critic whether the same evil exists *now*.

So in the case of the loafer. Many over-confident, but not very profound, critics, demand triumphantly, "What will you do with your loafers?"

To them I say, "What do *you* do with your loafers?"

The word loafer, I take it, means one who loafs or sponges upon the earnings of other people.

A loafer, then, may be an idle tramp without a shirt to his back, or he may be an idle peer with a rent-roll of half a million a year.

It is stated in one of the Fabian tracts—"Facts for Socialists"—that there are something like a million of adult males in receipt of large incomes who never do any kind of work at all.

Under Socialism these men might continue idle; but they would certainly not continue rich, nor would they continue to be known as "gentlemen."

But besides the millions of well-paid and well-fed loafers who are at present supported upon the earnings of the poor, there are now in this country immense numbers of paupers, beggars, tramps, and criminals, as well as a large army of unemployed workers.

Now before I tell you what would be done with all these people under Socialism, I must tell you what is done with them now.

Do you suppose that society does not support these loafers? But they live; and what do they live on?

All wealth is won by labour, is it not? Then all the tramps, thieves, paupers, and beggars live upon poor-rates, plunder, alms, or prison allowances, and all these means of support are earned by the labour of the working poor.

But under your present system you not only feed and house these loafers, but you go to the expense of masters, matrons, doctors, warders, and police, all of whom have to be fed and paid to wait upon or attend to the loafers.

Next, with regard to the unemployed. These people exist; and they exist in enforced idleness, and at the expense of those who work.

Note one or two facts. These people do nothing for their own support, and many of them, through want and shame, and forced idleness, become criminals or tramps.

This is not only a waste of wealth, and a waste of power, it is also a most wicked and disgraceful waste of human souls.

Now, let us see how things would work out under Socialism. We will divide our loafers into two classes. Those who could work and will not, and those who would work and cannot.

So long as it is possible for a willing worker to be forced into idleness, so long will there exist a reason for the giving of alms.

Why do we relieve a tramp on the road, or a beggar in the street? It is because we are never sure that the man is a loafer; because we always fear that his penury may be due to misfortune, and not to idleness. But under Socialism this doubt would disappear. Under Socialism there would be work for all. Therefore, under Socialism every man who was able to work would be able to live. This fact being universally known, no able-bodied man could exist without work. A beggar or a tramp would be inevitably a loafer, and not a hand would be held out to help him.

The answer to the able-bodied beggar would be "If you are hungry go and work." If the man refused to work he must starve.

The answer, then, to the question of what Socialists would do with the loafers is, that under Socialism we should oblige the loafer to work or perish; whereas, under present conditions, we either make him into a "gentleman" or a pauper, or a beggar, or a thief; in any one of which capacities he is allowed to live in idleness upon the labour of other men.

Tell me, is it not true of Merrie England to-day that the idlest are the richest, and the most industrious the poorest amongst the people? Well, I want you to remind your critics of these things when they ask you what Socialists will do with their loafers.

Let us take another question.

2. Under Socialism: Who will do the disagreeable work? *Who will do the scavenging?*

This question is an old friend of mine, and I have come to entertain for it a tender affection. I have seldom heard an argument or read an adverse letter or speech against the claims of justice in social matters, but our friend the scavenger played a prominent part therein. Truly, this scavenger is a most important person. Yet one would not suppose that the whole cosmic scheme revolved on him as on an axis; one would not imagine him to be the keystone of European society—at least his appearance and his wages would not justify such an assumption. But I begin to believe that the fear of the scavenger is really the source and fountain head, the life and blood and breath of all conservatism. Good old scavenger. His ash-paŋ is the

bulwark of capitalism, and his besom the standard around which rally the pride and the culture and the opulence of British society. And he never knew it; he does not know it now. If he did he would strike for another penny a day.

We have heard a good deal of more or less clumsy ridicule at the expense of the Socialist. We have heard learned and practical men laugh them to scorn; we have seen their claims and their desires and their theories held up to derision. But can any man imagine a sight more contemptible or more preposterous than that of a civilised and wealthy nation coming to a halt in its march of progress for fear of disturbing the minds of the scavengers?

Shades of Cromwell, of Langton, of Washington and of Hampden! Imagine the noble lord at the head of the British Government aweing a truculent and Radical Parliament into silence by thundering out the terrible menace, "Touch the dustman, and you destroy the Empire." Yet, when the noble lord talks about "tampering with the laws of political economy," and "opening the floodgates of anarchy," it is really the scavenger that is in his mind, although the noble lord may not think so himself, noble lords not being always very clear in their reasonings. For just as Mrs. Partington sought to drive back the ocean with a mop, so does the Conservative hope to drive back the sea of progress with the scavenger's broom.

For an answer to this question I must refer you back to my chapter on Socialism and Slavery. But the whole subject has, I find, been very clearly and ably dealt with by Mrs. Besant in her excellent paper on "The Organisation of Society" in the Fabian Essays. • Mrs. Besant says:—

There are unpleasant and indispensable forms of labour which, one would imagine, can attract none—mining, sewer-cleaning, &c. These might be rendered attractive by making the hours of labour in them much shorter than the normal working day of pleasanter occupations. . . .

Further, much of the most disagreeable and laborious work might be done by machinery, as it would be now if it were not cheaper to exploit a helot class. When it became illegal to send small boys up chimneys, chimneys did not cease to be swept; a machine was invented for sweeping them.

The same idea is expressed in Bellamy's "Looking Backward."

In the army the various duties are taken in turns. Guard duty, piquet duty, and the numerous laborious or unpleasant tasks known as "fatigue" are done by parties of men told off for the purpose, and no man can escape his share.

And how is this work done in Merrie England to-day? Clearly we all recognise that scavenging is unpleasant work. Clearly we all agree that no man would do it from choice. But some men do it, and the inference is that they do it on compulsion. They do it, and are made to work long hours for low wages, and are despised for their pains.

This is gross tyranny and gross injustice, but it is only another example of the meanness, the selfishness, and the dishonesty of those whom we falsely call the refined and superior classes. It is amusing to hear that a man is "too much of a gentleman" to empty his own ashpit, when the truth is that he is not enough of a gentleman to refuse to allow his fellow-citizen to empty it for him. Under Socialism snobbery will perish. And when snobbery is dead, gentility will be ready for burial.

Another common question is:—

3. Under Socialism: Would the frugal workman lose his house and savings?

First, as to the savings. M. Richter, in his foolish pamphlet, "Pictures of the Future," makes the people revolt because a Socialistic Government has nationalised their savings.

Now, we will assume that such a thing happened, and that the deposits in the banks were nationalised. Would the frugal workman lose by that? I say he would not.

It is true that at present the frugal workman only gets about one-third of his earnings. Under Socialism he would get *all* his earnings.

But why does the frugal workman save? He saves against a "rainy day." Because if he fall ill, or live to be old and infirm, he will have to go to the workhouse unless he has saved.

But under Socialism he need have no fear. No man would be left destitute or helpless in his old age. The sick would be cared for, the widows and orphans would be cherished and defended.

You know that many men now pay high premiums to insurance companies. This is to provide for their widows and children. Under Socialism the State would provide for the widows and children.

That is to say that Socialism is the finest scheme of life insurance ever yet devised.

Suppose you had by dint of great care succeeded in saving two or three hundred pounds. Would you not cheerfully pay that for a State promise of support for yourself when old—of ample and honourable support—and of support and education for your children after your death?

But I don't think it is at all likely that a Socialist State *would* take the worker's savings.

And again I ask you to turn your attention to the present system, under which *every* worker is robbed of two-thirds of all he earns.

Then as to the worker's cottage. Assuming that he has bought it with his savings, and assuming that the State nationalised it. What then? A workman now buys a house that he and his children may be sure of a home.

Under Socialism *every* man would be sure of a home.

Once more consider our present system. A few men own their own houses. But the great bulk of the people cannot own a foot of land.

When I was in Ireland I visited some "estates" upon the Galtee Hills. I saw farms which had been *made* by the "tenants." I saw places where the peasants had gone up into the bleak hills, where the limestone blocks lay thick and only a thin layer of sandy turf covered the rock, and had spent twenty years in *making the land*. They removed the boulders, they dug soil in the valleys, and carried it up the steeps in baskets; they bought manure and lime and they built their own hovels out of mud and stones.

And then the estate and houses were the property of the landlord, and he raised their rents from 200 to 500 per cent.

And we are asked whether Socialism would rob the frugal worker of his home!

It is strange that men should attach importance to such trivial points as these; but yet I believe that these small errors are a great hindrance to the spread of Socialism.

Here is another droll question:—

4. Under Socialism: Who would get the salmon, and who would get the red-herrings?

Let us follow the system I suggested, and reverse the question. Who gets the salmon and who gets the red-herrings now?

Is it not true that the salmon and all other delicacies are monopolised by the idle, while the coarse food falls to the lot of the worker?

Perhaps under Socialism the salmon might be eaten by those who catch it. At present it is not.

Or perhaps the dainties would be reserved for invalids and old people, or for delicate women and children.

But certainly we should not see a lot of big, fat, strong aldermen gorging turtle and champagne while frail girls worked sixteen hours a day on a diet of crusts and coffee.

It is quite possible that even under Socialism there might not be enough salmon and pineapple for all. But it is quite certain that there would be enough bread and beef and tea for all, which there certainly is not *now*.

And so much for that question; and, if you care to follow it out more fully, I must refer you to my answer to Richter's "Pictures of the Future."

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### PAID AGITATORS.

You will find, if you think deeply of it, that the chief of all the curses of this unhappy age is the universal gabble of its fools, and of the flocks that follow them, rendering the quiet voices of the wise men of all past time inaudible.—*Ruskin*.

The capitalist Press, probably because they cannot controvert the theory of Socialism, are in the habit of abusing Socialists. Socialist writers and Socialist speakers, and very often Trade Union leaders, are commonly described as "Paid Agitators;" and our Labour papers are charged with "pandering to the worst passions of the mob," and with "battening on the earnings of ignorant dupes."

This is pretty much the same kind of language as that which the Press employed against John Bright, Ernest Jones, C. S. Parnell, Charles Bradlaugh, and other