

## CHAPTER X.

### Remedies—3. Communism and Socialism.

Your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams.—Acts, 2:17.

The remedies for existing evils discussed in the last two chapters presuppose the existence of the evils, but offer no satisfactory solution. They are not radical because they do not go to the root of the trouble. We must now consider two proposed solutions which certainly do not err from lack of radicalism, namely, those of anarchist-communism and of socialism.

The anarchist-communist is keenly alive to the injustice of the present social system. He sees that it is supported by government and that government rests upon force, and he proposes the abolition of all government, and upon its ruins he expects to see independent communities of co-operators arise, in which justice shall be done to all. The right to land will depend on occupancy. Some goods will be produced in such quantities that there will be more than enough for all, and of these all who need may take. Others will not be so plentiful, and these will be apportioned in the same way that now in a besieged town food and clothing are served out to the inhabitants. The accepted principle will be, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." This is certainly a beautiful dream, and William Morris has given a fitting picture of it in his "News from Nowhere." I do not think, however, that it involves too great a lack of faith in humanity to say that the world is not yet ready for such a civilization, introduced in such a way. It is one thing to see the evils of

government by force, to protest against them, and refuse to take part in them; but it is quite another to "abolish" that government by an equally disastrous exercise of force, and the men who take part in such a revolution will be the least adapted to the ideal life which is to succeed it. There is one virtue in communism, and that is that it can be tried anywhere by any group of people. Existing laws may make such experiments more difficult, but they cannot prevent their success. And the objection to communism is that it has never yet succeeded. Its failure is due not to any fault in the dream but to the defects of human nature. It is not too much to ask of communists that they should prove the fitness of their theories to human nature as it is, by a few successful examples, before they expect mankind to listen to their programme. Communism is a good star to hitch your wagon to, but hardly a matter yet for practical politics.

The solution of socialism resembles that of communism in one point, but differs from it essentially in all others. It calls, too, for co-operation; but so far from abolishing government, it makes government the center of all. Socialists propose to establish justice by having the state take over all the means of production and distribution, assigning to each individual a just wage for his labor. They recognize fully the injustice upon which the present system is founded, and seeing, as they suppose, that the natural laws of trade lead to plutocracy and pauperism, they determine to have nothing further to do with natural laws, but to convert the state into a special Providence which shall provide for all and enter into every detail of industrial life. The initial error of the orthodox socialists seems to me, therefore, to be a total lack of faith in natural laws. That superficial thinkers should come to such a conclusion when they observe the gross unfairness of our society is not to be wondered at, but it is not what should be expected of men who arrogate to themselves the name "scientific." We have already

made the acquaintance of some of these laws. When the demand for an article diminishes, the manufacturer, seeing the price fall, ceases to make it, and turns to the manufacture of some other article for which the demand is increasing and the price consequently rising. This is a beautiful automatic arrangement by which the economic atoms of society tend of themselves to keep the market in a state of equilibrium. A man shows an aptitude for a given trade; his customers increase and therefore he has more to do and earns more wages, and he continues in the trade in which he is succeeding. Another man enters the same trade but shows no taste for it. He loses his custom and is driven to try something else for which he is better fitted. By this natural law men tend to find the position of greatest utility in society. Wages are highest where laborers are most needed, and prices are highest where goods are most needed, thus attracting men and things where they are wanted; and inversely, prices and wages drop where there is a surplus of goods or men respectively, thus discouraging the importation of them from other places. The list of such beneficent laws could be continued indefinitely, and it is quite evident that, were it not for friction and obstruction, they would work with as great precision as the law that water seeks its own level. The Romans, ignorant of this law, built enormous aqueducts, bringing water down an inclined plane to their cities; and we know to-day that these magnificent pieces of masonry were altogether unnecessary, and that nature would have restored the water to its old level, if man had given her the chance. The socialists propose to do the same thing, only on an infinitely greater scale. They will at every point substitute men's laws for nature's laws, having suffered, as they think, from the latter. So a man, having been burned by fire, might resolve never to obtain warmth or light from combustion again; and one who had been injured by a fall might try to dispense forever with the law of gravitation. Surely

this is not "scientific." The scientific attitude is to study the laws of nature and adapt ourselves to them, and procure from them all the benefit we can, at the same time avoiding their evil effects. The man who invents a piece of machinery, so far from dispensing with natural laws, makes use of them in every possible way; and without gravitation, the expansion of steam when water is boiled, or the tendency of an electric current to convert soft iron into a magnet, his machine would stand still. If he said, "Gravitation has crushed me, steam has scalded me, and electricity has shocked me, and I intend to get on without them," he would prove his utter unfitness for the tasks of an inventor and constructor of machines. And it is so with the machinery of social and industrial life. It must use the existing social forces, supply and demand, competition and the rest, or it will come to grief.

And is competition the unmixed evil which socialists say it is? Is it not a rule of nature which we cannot escape, however much we may wish to? Even in the ideal socialist state A, B and C will make boots, and A will make them better than either of the others. It will follow that C, D and E will prefer to have A's boots, and here is the law of competition again, which we supposed dead and buried. And it is a rather fortunate case of resurrection, too, for the preference of A's boots will be a constant incentive to B and C to improve, and to A to preserve his standard. Socialist magazines to-day compete with other journals and with each other; and I once presided at a debate in which a socialist professor argued for a whole evening against an orthodox economist to prove the essential evil of competition, sublimely ignorant the while that he was engaging in competition of an aggravated form as he spoke. Socialism itself is competing with the other "isms" and with the existing state of society, and if it ever comes in, it will be by virtue of this despised law of nature. The socialist state will then show gross ingratitude if it denies its

author. In the co-operative commonwealth, which is the socialist's dream, they will have foremen and managers, and these will be selected from the workmen, and it will be a competitive system of a sort, whether it is so called or not. Competition may indeed be exaggerated in our existing system, but it is because men are shut out from the resources of nature, and fear that if they are crowded out of their present occupation, there will be no work for them. With all natural opportunities open to them, competition would lose its sting. The competition of drowning men round an insufficient raft is hideous because their opportunities are restricted. Give them raft enough, and you will soon find them helping each other. It is the artificial limitation of this world-raft of ours that accounts for the competitive evils of trade. Nothing will so encourage the growth of the co-operative spirit as the opening of opportunities to all. But even when this spirit has full sway, competition will still exist, inherent in the very nature of life.

Disregarding natural laws, refusing to see that the natural reward of labor is the product of labor, and that hence the fact that the laborer does not get it must be the result of artificial obstructions which can be removed—socialism, when it undertakes to reconstruct society without these laws, is entering upon a task which quite transcends human powers. Socialists wish artificially to attain an end which ought to be attained automatically. It is natural that a man should have the product of his labor. The appropriation of it by others is unnatural. Is it not wiser to remove the obstructions to nature, rather than to attempt to perform her functions? Our bodies to a great extent take care of themselves, and our brains are not forced to occupy themselves with the details of the circulation of the blood and the digestion of food. Suppose a man made the attempt to "run" his own body—to direct every heart-beat, every secretion by act of his mind. We would call him insane. And yet the idea that all the details

of labor and business can be effectively managed by the central government is almost as absurd. We are told that the trusts do it, but this is a great misconception. The trusts cover a comparatively small portion of industry as yet, and they do not construct and manage affairs from the center. They find a number of industries already full-grown and active, and they merely combine them and regulate them. The trust industries grew up from the ground, and the vitality of the trusts came from their constituent members. There must be life in each limb and member and molecule before we can have a live body, and a co-operative commonwealth must be an aggregation of vital units before it can become vital itself. The whole idea of forming a live social system from the top by a central committee is fallacious. Such things may be done after a fashion in the field of politics, for politics only touch life at a few definite points, but industry is a large part of the life of the community, and its growth must be vital and not artificial.

In meeting such arguments socialists are extremely vague. They build up national parties in all countries with the object of making the state take over the means of production; but if you maintain that industry is not a political matter, that governments are conventional while industry is vital, and that it is industrial growth and not political carpentry that is wanted, they will assent to all that you say, admit that their political parties are more or less for show, and suddenly give up the role of politicians for that of prophets. Socialism is coming of itself, they will tell you, and that, too, in the industrial field, and the trusts are making the new world and not the socialist committees. There is a certain vagueness in all this. Either the state, the political state, is to become the central trust, or it is not. The revolution is to be either industrial or political. And if it is to be industrial, the less that politics has to do with it—except, indeed, to remove obstructions—the better. A state undertaking to direct

all industry would be overwhelmed with work in a day. The healthy man walks without thinking about it, but a socialist state would be like a victim of locomotor ataxia who has to apply his mind to every step.

And history shows that changes in the industrial system proceed along industrial and not along political lines. The transfer of power in England from the great landlords to the commercial and manufacturing class was a purely industrial movement, and the only assistance which it obtained from legislation was the abolition of the corn laws, which were artificial obstructions to natural laws. By the same token, the proper course to pursue to-day would be in the direction of a similar removal of artificial obstructions to natural industrial evolution. So the trusts have come to life through industrial development, and not only that, but they have been opposed and are still opposed, in form at least, at every advance, by the world of politics. The benefits which they owe to legislation have been surreptitious and indirect. Granted the privileges which they enjoy, their growth has been economic, and economic alone. Is it reasonable to suppose that this industrial revolution will be suddenly transferred from the economic to the political field, and that the state will in a moment obtain a vitality which it has long wanted? The real life of the working-class movement is in the trade unions, because they are industrial, and it is a true instinct which keeps the unions out of the political field.

Socialists point to the public school system as an example of the work which the state can do. One of their writers recently called attention to the fact that the people have their own "schools and equipment for education," and then he proceeds to say: "If the reader will just put the words, 'shops, factories and other equipment for labor' in the place of the words 'schools and equipment for education,' he will see what the application of the system of socialism means in the realm of industry. It seems to the writer that

this argument is irresistible to an unprejudiced mind and wholly unanswerable."

It fairly takes the breath away to read this "unanswerable" argument. The problem for socialism, as for every other proposed economic system, is the workability of its proposed arrangements. Society must somehow support itself under any system, and if it consumes more than it produces, it will soon come to grief. It is primarily a matter of the production and distribution of wealth. The public school is a poor illustration, to begin with, for only in the broadest sense can it be said to be a producer of wealth at all. But let this point go. Let us consider education and instruction as tangible wealth. The first thing to note about the public school system is that it gives its product away for nothing. There is no pretense whatever made that it is self-supporting, and no kind of books are kept which might establish the fact. Its enormous expense is met by taxation. If the government wished to go into the business of giving away diamond rings it could do so successfully, so long as it had a rich enough community to tax to pay for them, but this success would hardly constitute an argument for socialism. The money for the public schools is provided by taxation upon our individualistic and competitive industries, and the only thing that this proves is the immense vitality of these industries and their ability to bear heavy taxation and yet thrive, and that with a big enough money-bag any undertaking becomes financially practicable—but surely we knew that already. If socialism should gradually absorb the industries of the country, there would be left fewer and fewer industries to tax, and without a kind government to meet the bills out of its treasury, the socialist problem would become a very different one. And so the "wholly unanswerable" argument has really not a single leg to stand on.

The post-office is a better illustration of socialism than the public school, for it tries to pay

its way; but here again we are met by various anomalies. This department of the government is founded upon a totally unwarrantable monopoly. Why should I be prevented from making a living by carrying letters, if I wish to? The prohibition is an unjust trespass upon personal liberty to perform useful acts. We see at once the wrong of the government tobacco monopoly in certain European countries, but the letter-carrying monopoly is quite as improper. The government might just as well reserve to itself the right of building houses. It might be supposed that anyone possessing a great monopoly of the kind might make it pay expenses. But such is not the case. The service of the post-office is indifferent, its management is corrupt, and the general atmosphere of its stations is slovenly and unbusinesslike; and yet, if it could not fall back upon your and my individual enterprise to meet the deficit every year by taxation, it would have gone into bankruptcy long ago. We must admit, however, the advantages of a national post-office. No one has made a hundred millions out of that industry. It has not been the means of gathering the earnings of the many into a few hands. It does its work at the same price for all, and a low price at that, without preferential rates or rebates for favored customers. These are distinct merits, and might perhaps induce a good many people to prefer socialism to plutocracy, if the former programme, aiming at all industrial activities, could actually be made to work.

Socialism seeks to cure the ills of monopoly by creating one great monopoly and taking everybody into it. It points to the great waste of our system, the advertising, the employment of an army of traveling salesmen, the internecine strife; oblivious to the fact that these evils arise from excessive competition due to the monopolizing of the earth and its resources. Socialism might stop these evils, if it was practicable at all, but it would be easier to remove them by removing their cause. Monopoly may perhaps be cured by more

monopoly, but the obvious remedy seems to be, "No monopoly."

Socialism involves one great injustice, and that is the taking away from men of that which they have made. It is a natural law that a robin should own her nest, and it is equally natural that I should own what I make. To take my goods from me and administer them against my will, is immoral.

There are some peculiarities of socialism which require a word. It is the most dogmatic of parties, having received the mantle, in this respect, of the old Calvinists; and it is strange that religious peculiarities should have descended to a party which is largely materialistic. They have a pope in Karl Marx and a Bible in his "Kapital," and woe to the heretic within the pale who questions either. He is soon excommunicated with bell and book. The *odium socialisticum* is as bad as the *odium theologicum* in its worst form. Socialists believe in the absolute predestination of their theories and that they are without question the elect, and though they believe in predestination, they still send missionaries to the end of the earth to convert the heathen. Their dogmas do not appeal to my intellect, and for that reason I am obliged to regard myself deficient. They insist, for instance, upon belief in "class-consciousness," namely, that the worker should feel himself a member of a class with a grievance, and of different flesh and blood from the class against which he has a grievance. But it is not easy to draw the class line in this way. The workman with a savings bank account, the railway president with his millions laid by, belong to both classes, and in different degrees are each employer and employed. The idea, too, that this conscious class is to assault the other class and carry their position, is crude in the extreme. Socialists in power would be no better masters than the plutocrats of to-day, and many of them would be worse, as the tyrannical behavior of their party often demonstrates. All men who wish to exploit their fel-

lows really belong to the exploiting class, and there are few civilized men left out of that category. And finally, the most "class-conscious" men I know are not workingmen at all, but men of wealth, professional men, business men, who have been moved by irresistible sympathy to take the side of the down-trodden. The entire idea of class-consciousness is unsound.

Another socialistic dogma of equally binding force is what they term the "economic interpretation of history," which means that man's advance, physical, mental and spiritual, has been altogether due to changes in his economic condition. We are indeed composed of body and mind, and it is well that there should be a reaction against the extreme idealist position that there is nothing but mind; but idealism is still a force in human affairs, and the thought often precedes the fact. I do not dwell upon this subject here as I have treated it fully in another place with reference to the American Abolitionists.\*

Another socialistic dogma is the assumption that the idea of "natural rights" has been exploded, and that anyone who now believes in them is hopelessly imbecile. I confess that I still cling to natural rights, exploded though they be; and I venture timidly to maintain that a bird has a natural right to its nest and a babe to its mother's breast, and I challenge anyone to controvert the statement. From this I may go on and say that I have a natural right to my arms and hence to the opportunity to work with them, and consequently to my share of the raw material of the globe. We may well differ as to the point at which natural rights cease, but that there are natural rights is scarcely disputable.

One of the greatest objections to socialism is its intention of magnifying the state. A man must be enamored indeed of bureaucracy to suggest the conversion of all men into bureaucrats. Officialism is a most unattractive thing, especi-

\*Garrison the Non-Resistant. Chapter X, pp. 97-104. The Public Publishing Co., Chicago, 1905.

ally to the American, and it will require strong proof to induce the American people to swallow so distasteful a remedy. It is all very well to say that the new state will differ from the old, but how can we be sure of that? The state which we know is arbitrary, mechanical, soulless, unbusinesslike and slow in its operation. Above all, it is drunk with the sense of its divine right. A mail wagon comes down the street, and everything must get out of its way, milk wagons, grocery carts and all. Why? Milk and groceries are more important to the human race than letters. There is no reason except the survival of the medieval doctrine of the divine right of kings and the still flourishing fetish of the sanctity of government. Until we can get rid of this idea, until we look upon the postman, the legislator and the judge, as we look upon the grocer and the milkman, it will be dangerous to add greatly to the scope of state activity. There are certain races which show less antipathy to officialism than others, and I am sure that an experiment in socialism would have a greater chance of success in Germany than in an Anglo-Saxon or Latin country. It is therefore in the interests of the socialist movement that the first experiment should be made in one of these empires. It is not desirable that every country should advance in precisely the same way as the others, for it is by variation that evolution chooses the best path. Let the subjects of the Kaiser then attempt the experiment of establishing a ubiquitous government, and leave some other parts of the program to us.

It is not unlikely that the economic issue may be soonest and best solved in Russia. The question presents itself more simply there. Their civilization is not so complex as ours. Fewer people have crowded into the cities, and the vast mass of the population is still agricultural. They see wealth from day to day coming out of the ground. They know that the earth is the mother of riches, and that to control the soil is to control the people who live on it. City people are the

most ignorant of men. I remember once when I was a very small boy, announcing my intention to do something very grand when I grew up. "Where will you get the money?" asked a skeptical bystander. "Out of my pocket," I answered triumphantly. And so in town men think that money comes out of banks, and food out of restaurants, and other things from stores and markets, and it is easy to fool them. But the countryman knows that it all comes from the land. So it is at least in Russia. For our country-people have already been contaminated by the town-people, and they are now possessed by the idea that there is a goose in the city that lays golden eggs, and the young men desert their homes for the city as soon as they can, hoping in some way to get something for nothing, and those who succeed do harm to the country instead of good, and usually become parasites instead of producers. And so it is that the Russian people, with all their ignorance, see clearer than we do on this one question of the land, and if they only insist upon having it settled first, it is not impossible that they may show the rest of the world how to treat it, and thus take the lead of humanity, instead of bringing up the rear. And for this I fervently hope, for it would avert the danger of costly experiments in state socialism.

I criticise socialism, however, with the greatest feeling of friendliness to socialists, with whom I feel far more sympathy than with the Wall Street régime of to-day. But it seems to me a great pity that such earnest men, with so true an appreciation of present evils, should apply their strength to the impossible, and should hold up an ideal which with all its virtues, forgets the prime virtue of freedom.