CHAPTER IV

THE ETHICAL CONCEPTIONS

THE conception which Socialism has formed with regard to the relations existing between individuals and the social entity to which they belong, is totally opposed to that formed by Liberalism and Democratic Radicalism, and is practically identical with that prevailing under the despotism of the post-reformation period.[1] Apart from socialists, it is, at the present time, to be found only among the belated survivals of that period, who march in the rear of English Toryism, or compose the junker-parties of Germany and Austria.[2]

It consists in the denial of the existence of abstract or natural human rights, and its converse, the assertion that all individual rights are derived from the State, as well as in the logical deduction from these premises, that any

[1] "All that is found within the limits of our State belongs to us by the same title. You may rest assured that kings have the right of full and absolute disposition over all the property possessed by the clergy as well as the laity, to use it at all times with wise economy, that is, according to the general necessity of the State."—"Mémoires de Louis XIV. pour l' instruction du Dauphin," Yves Guyot, *La Propriété.*

"The Liberty of the subject lieth, therefore, in those things which, in regulating their action, the sovereign hath prætermitted. . . . Nevertheless, we are not to understand that by such liberty, the sovereign power of life and death is either abolished, or limited. For it hath already been shown that nothing the sovereign representative can do to a subject on what pretence soever can properly be called injustice or injury; . . . and the same holdeth also in a sovereign prince that putteth to death an innocent subject. For though the action be against the law of nature, as being contrary to equity, as was the killing of Uriah, by David, yet it was not an injury to Uriah, but to God."—"The English Works of Thomas Hobbes," by Sir William Molesworth, Bart., vol. iii. *Leviathan*, pp. 99, 100.

[2] "Be it that there are natural rights—that is, in a state of nature, where there is nothing artificial. But men have formed themselves into a social state; all is artificial and nothing merely natural. In such a state no rights ought to exist but what are for the general good—all that are should."—Lord Bramwell, *Land and Capital. The Pseudo-Scientific Theory of Men's Natural Rights.* W. H. Mallock, *Studies of Contemporary Superstitions.*

and all such rights may justly be cancelled by the State, if the latter is of opinion that its interests will be served thereby.

Thus Sidney Webb, in *Socialism in England*, states, p. 79 : "A wide divergence of thought is here apparent between England and the United States. In England the old *a priori* individualism is universally abandoned. No professor ever founds any argument, whether in defence of the rights of property or otherwise, upon the inherent right of the individual to his own physical freedom and to the possession of such raw material as he has made his own by expending personal effort upon. The first step must be to rid our minds of the idea that there are any such things in social matters as abstract rights" (*The State in Relation to Labour*, chap. i. p. 6, by the late W. Stanley Jevons). . . . "The whole case on both sides is now made to turn exclusively on the balance of social advantages." Laurence Gronlund formulates the theory as follows, in *The Co-operative Commonwealth*, pp. 82, 83, and 85 :—

"It" (the conception of the State as an organism), "together with the modern doctrine of evolution as applied to all organisms, deals a mortal blow to the theory of 'man's natural rights,' the theory of man's inalienable right to life, liberty, property, happiness, etc. . . . These so-called 'natural rights' and an equally fictitious 'law of nature' were invented by Jean Jacques Rousseau. Philosophic socialists repudiate that theory of 'natural rights.' It is Society, organised Society, the State, that gives us all the rights we have. . . . As against the State, the organised Society, even Labour does not give us a particle of title to what our hands and brain produce."

In addition to these socialist authorities, an opponent of authority may also be cited, Professor Robert Flint, who states in *Socialism*, p. 373 :—

"It" (Socialism) "denies to the individual any rights independent of Society ; and assigns to Society authority to do whatever it deems for its own good with the persons, faculties, and possessions of individuals."

This denial of individual rights within the Society and independent of that Society, naturally has, as correlative,

the conception, that the State does not exist for the benefit of the individuals composing it, at any given time; that it is an independent organism, possessing an entity and purpose of its own, and that therefore the will, not only of any one individual, but of all individuals, is subordinate to the will of the State. Thus, again quoting from *Socialism in England*, pp. 82, 83, Sidney Webb states:—

"The lesson of Evolution, at first thought to be the apotheosis of anarchic individual competition, is now recognised to be quite the contrary. . . . Even the Political Economists are learning this lesson, and the fundamental idea of a social organism paramount over and prior to the individual of each generation is penetrating to their minds and appearing in their lectures."

Laurence Gronlund's exposition of the theory is too lengthy for quotation in full; the concluding sentences (*The Co-operative Commonwealth*, p. 81) read:—

"We therefore insist that the State is a living organism, differing from other organisms in no essential respect. This is not to be understood in a simply metaphorical sense; it is not that the State merely resembles an organism, but that it—including with the people, the land and all that the land produces—literally is *an organism*, personal and territorial.

"It follows that the relations of the State, the body politic, to us, its citizens, is *actually* that of a tree to its cells, and *not* that of a heap of sand to its grains, to which it is entirely indifferent how many other grains of sand are scattered and trodden underfoot.

"This is a conception of far-reaching consequence."

The consequences which Gronlund draws from this conception are exhibited in the preceding quotation from his work. That they are far reaching cannot be denied. It would be inopportune, at this stage of our inquiry, to examine them or to criticise these conceptions themselves. All that can conveniently be done here, is to show that these ideas form part of the "scientific" synthesis which Socialism claims as its foundation.

It is, however, necessary to point out that this conception of the relations between the State and the in-

dividuals composing the State is not adopted arbitrarily by the authorities which have been quoted. It is a necessary consequence of the basic conceptions as well as of the industrial and distributive proposals of Socialism. For the admission of individual rights, prior to and independent of the State, would stamp these proposals as in the highest degree unjust and despotic. Their defence, on the ethical side, cannot, therefore, be undertaken except on the supposition that no such rights exist, and that all human rights emanate from and are dependent upon the arbitrary will of the State.

To the labourer belongs the fruit of his toil, is generally regarded as the only ethical standard of economic justice. Socialism utterly denies the truth of this proposition, and teaches that the fruits of individual labour belong, not to the labourer, but to the society of which he forms part, to be used by it in such manner as may, in its opinion, promise the best social results. Citing again Laurence Gronlund, we find the following clear and emphatic statement of this conception on p. 145 of *The Co-operative Commonwealth*:—

"A man is entitled to the full proceeds of his labour against any other individual, *but not against society*. Society is not bound to reward a man either in proportion to his services, nor yet to his wants, but according to expediency; according to the behests of her own welfare. Man's work *is* not a *quid pro quo*, but *a trust*."

This doctrine is based on several different and complementary lines of reasoning. One, mechanical, derives communistic proprietary rights from the far-reaching co-operative processes of modern industry, rendering it impossible to discover which part of any finished product and what share in its value owes its existence to the labour of any individual co-operator, and posits that it is equally impossible to assign to any of them equitable proprietary rights in any part, or in the value of such product. Thus W. D. P. Bliss, in *A Handbook of Socialism*, p. 188, states:—

"Nor can the principle that capital should be private property, because it is the work of man, be allowed in

equity, since it is practically impossible to say what man produced any given portion of capital. All successful production to-day, mental and manual alike, is the result of social processes so intricate that it is impossible to measure the share in the production taken by any one man." Says Edward Bellamy: "Nine hundred and ninety-nine parts out of the thousand of every man's produce are the result of his social inheritance and environment."

While this argument is mainly directed to prove the impossibility of allotting to each labourer the fruits of his toil, another boldly asserts its inequity. Taking the theories of evolution and of value for its basis, it asserts that individual capacity and industry are the result of heredity, arising from the ancestral struggle for existence. Being thus the result of social causes, their product belongs to Society, and not to the individual who accidentally possesses them. Allied to this is the further conception, that the value of any labour product, arising not from the act of the producer, but from the desires of the consumers, *i.e.* from a social cause, such value cannot equitably belong to the producer, but only to Society as a whole.

Still another line of reasoning deduces social ownership of labour products from the influence of the social environment, both on the labourer and the produce of his labour.

The following quotations show examples of these several and cognate arguments. Sir Henry Wrixon attributes to Sidney Webb the following statement (*Socialism*, p. 83):—

"The socialists would nationalise both rent and interest, by the State becoming the sole landowner and capitalist. . . . Such an arrangement would, however, leave untouched the third monopoly, the largest of them all, the monopoly of business ability. The more recent socialists strike, therefore, at this monopoly also, by allotting to every worker an equal wage whatever the nature of the work. This equality has an abstract justification, as the special ability or energy with which some persons are born is an unearned increment due to the struggle for existence upon their ancestors, and consequently having

been produced by Society, is as much due to Society as the 'unearned increment of rent.'"

In the *Fabian Essays*, p. 127, the following opinion is expressed :—

"For now, for the first time since the dissolution of the early tribal communisms, and over areas a hundred times wider than theirs, the individual worker earns his living, fulfils his most elementary desires, not by direct personal production, but by an intricate co-operation in which the effect and value of his personal efforts are almost indistinguishable. The apology for individualistic appropriation is exploded by the logic of the facts of communist production; no man can pretend to claim the fruits of his own labour, for his whole ability and opportunity for working are plainly a vast inheritance and contribution of which he is but a transient and accidental beneficiary and steward, and his power of turning them to his own account depends entirely upon the desires and needs of other people for his services. The factory system, the machine industry, the world commerce, have abolished individualistic production."

In *Equality*, Edward Bellamy's latest work, the following argument occurs :—

"All human beings are equal in rights and dignity, and only such a system of wealth distribution can therefore be defensible as respects and secures those equalities. The main factor in the production of wealth among civilised men is the social organism, the machinery of associated labour and exchange by which hundreds of millions of individuals provide the demand for one another's product and mutually complement one another's labours, thereby making the productive and distributive systems of a nation and of the world one great machine. . . .

"The element in the total industrial product, which is due to the social organism, is represented by the difference between the value of what one man produces as a worker in connection with the social organisation and what he could produce in a condition of isolation. . . . It is estimated that the average daily product of a worker in America is to-day some fifty dollars. The product of the

same man working in isolation would probably be highly estimated on the same basis by calculation if put at a quarter of a dollar. To whom belongs the social organism, this vast machinery of human association, which enhances some two hundredfold the product of every one's labour? . . . Society collectively can be the only heir to the social inheritance of intellect and discovery, and it is Society collectively which furnishes the continuous daily concourse by which alone that inheritance is made effective." [1]

On these grounds, Socialism boldly pronounces judgment against the older standard of industrial ethics, and declares, that not to the labourer who produces it, but to Society collectively, belongs the wealth which any man's labour produces, and that Society has absolute and exclusive proprietary rights in all the produce of individual labour.

[1] Pp. 79, 80.