

Tolstoi and Socialism.

IN the St. Louis Republic of Nov. 30th was an article, copyrighted by W. R. Hearst, under the title of "A Return to Nature," by Count Leo Tolstoi, in which the great Russian author appears as an enemy of Socialism.

It is hard to believe that an article so full of self-evident contradictions and so deficient in logical conclusions could have come from this great writer's pen.

The article starts well with the following:

"The fact that you workingmen are forced to pass your life in poverty, not to say misery; that you are condemned to the hardest kind of work that does not benefit, while other people who do not work at all reap the profits of your work—the fact that many of you are practically slaves of these people, and the fact that this is unjust, must be clear to anyone who has a heart and eyes to see with. But what is to be done to change this?"

He then advocates what he calls a return to nature, where every man becomes attached to the soil and individually or as a family produces everything he needs.

This is a condition of primitive barbarism which no one questions his right to advocate, but in the following references to Socialism he shows a surprising ignorance of the simplest conditions of Socialism.

I quote at length: "When all men have been deprived of the ground they possess, when they shall have become factory hands . . . then the time will come when they shall own in full all the lands and all the factories. One would think that a doctrine like this (Socialism) that asks the workingman, living and working in free, open air, occupied in good healthy farming work, to give up his free wholesome life close to nature's bosom and move into the noise and impure atmosphere of the city, to work like a machine at monotonous work in a factory, and to live in filthy, squalid tenement lodgings that will drive the color out of the cheeks of his children, would not have much chance of success among thoughtful men who, working their natural soil, are not used to being slaves, as the workers in a modern factory practically are. And still this doctrine which is called Socialism is gaining rapidly even in a country like Russia, where 98 per cent of the workingmen are still occupied at farm work."

In the first statement he assumes that the people are deprived of the ground they possess and then become full owners

of all the land as well as all the factories. Then, if the people become full owners of the land, what right has he to assume that they will be asked to give it up and move into impure cities, monotonous factories and filthy and squalid tenements, as he pictures in the following sentence? What right has he to assume that when the people own and operate the factories they will be as he pictures? If the people own them will they not transform them so that they can enjoy them and eliminate all the disagreeable features? He conceives of an entire change in society, its usages and customs, yet he leaves the cities and factories unchanged. He removes the sewer that befouls the stream, but cannot see that the stream is changed. How can he conceive of the cities filled with noisome factories and filthy and squalid tenements when the capitalist owners have been eliminated from our industrial activities and the people own their own homes?

He says further: "Land is all that is worth fighting for, all that is necessary to enable a man to make a living; and still the Socialist leaders say nothing about the land, or at least its importance is placed second to that of owning the factories. . . . The laboring masses must demand the land that is now owned by the few, they must demand it of their governments, not as a favor, but as a right, for the reason that all land should belong to those who will work it—and not to a class of useless drones."

Is it possible that Leo Tolstoi can be so ignorant of Socialism as not to know that the common ownership of land is the first and fundamental proposition of Socialism? Whether or not agriculture and its affiliated industries would be carried on collectively under Socialism or the use of the land given to individuals under a lease of use, no Socialist questions the necessity of the collective ownership of all lands. It would seem that the great Russian has formed a perverted conception of Socialism or the capitalistic press of this country has put false words upon his pen.

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