

SOCIALISM.

The following masterly article, by Father Yorke, of the San Francisco "Leader," strikes a warning note to which all workingmen, and especially Catholic workingmen, should give earnest heed.

One of the great dangers that confronts the labor movement in America is Socialism. Every day evidences are accumulating that the doctrines of this sect are being pushed within the organizations of the workingmen.

Within the last few weeks the Bishop of Denver has been compelled to make a public pronouncement concerning the matter in his diocese. Denver is the centre of the Socialistic propaganda, and the inter-mountain region its best field. Bishop Matz was certainly within the limits of right and prudence in warning his flock of the danger.

Now by Socialism we do not mean the Socialism of the Employers' Association. That intelligent body believes that any attempt on the part of the workingmen to better their condition is subversive of all law and order. Not being gifted with more wit than the law allows they think to frighten the community by shouting "Wolf! Wolf!" With their interpretation of the world we are not concerned; indeed we believe every Bishop of the Church is a Socialist according to them.

Neither do we mean by Socialism the Socialism of the timid or the conservative. There are many reforms useful or necessary in the social state which appear to certain minds as revolution. For instance, whatever may be our opinion about the expediency of public ownership in this or that particular case there is no doubt that the principle of the public ownership of public utilities is a sound principle. Yet there are many fearsome or crabbed people who look upon every proposal of municipalization or nationalization as rank Socialism. In this sense again every government in the world is Socialistic.

Neither by Socialism do we mean those political expedients which in other countries and here have been proclaimed as the remedy for all civic ills. For instance, the success of Socialism in Germany is to be attributed in a large part to its advocacy of certain reforms which we have enjoyed here from the beginning, as for example, the principle of one man, one vote. Again the Referendum, or the method of giving the people, as distinguished from their representatives, a chance to pass on a law, is often put forward as a Socialistic tenet, while as a matter of fact it exists in some form or another in every constitutional State.

But by Socialism we mean that doctrine properly so-called which has for its aim the betterment of society by the abolition of private property, the supersession of the family and the destruction of all individual enterprise. The end of Socialism is a legitimate end, namely, the improvement of social conditions. For that end all governments, all parties, are supposed to strive. The means which Socialism proposes to that end, namely, the abolition of private property, family life and individual effort are not only illegitimate, but are opposed to the very nature of things. It is these means which make Socialism as a doctrine repugnant to the Christian Revelation and to the dictates of common sense. It is for these reasons that the Pope has again and again written against it.

There are two ideas that stand over one against the other in irreconcilable antagonism—the Christian idea of man and the Socialistic idea of man. According to Christ, man is a creature whose chief value lies in his soul. That soul was made for another life, and man is here on earth to save his soul. He has temporal and social interests, but he has them only as helps to the great end of his existence. It matters little how successful he may be in earthly things; all is lost if he is not a success in things eternal. What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? This doctrine may seem hopelessly old-fashioned and out of touch with modern thought, but there it is—the fundamental idea of Christianity, and Christianity never grows old.

Now the Socialist idea is that man exists for this world to get all the good and pleasure and profit he can out of it with the least possible expenditure of energy. The Socialist puts religion and the religious feeling entirely out of court. It is true that the great Socialistic writers are uniformly anti-religious and that in most instances popular Socialism is accompanied by a vulgar atheism, yet we wish to give the Socialists the benefit of their professions and we are willing to accept their declaration that they put religion entirely out of discussion. They are dealing with man and the hard facts of the world, and their object is to let the soul and the future take care of themselves, but to see that the human animal is properly generated, properly bred, properly housed, properly fed and properly exercised. On these things hangeth the law and the prophets.

Socialism is the legitimate outcome of the revolution of the sixteenth century. It is really Puritanism carried into the domain of economics. The Puritans were bitten with the craze for regulating everything by law. They believed that, given a certain machinery, they could make men just, sober, pure, honest. When they found out that human nature was too strong for them their only remedy was more law. To this day the country is overrun with societies for reformation of everything in sight, and these societies believe that the best way to carry out their ends is to have a law passed by the Legislature commanding people to be moral. It is no lesson to them that law after law remains a failure. Deep down in their hearts they have the Puritan principle that men can be made moral by exterior agencies, and they cast the blame of their failure on the police or the judges or the community, never admitting that their principle itself is false.

Now Socialism starts with the same principle. It believes that men can be made prosperous and happy in mass. To make men happy it declares it is necessary that every man should have sufficient to eat and drink, that he should be comfortably clothed; that he should have sufficient recreation to keep his body in good condition, and sufficient opportunity to improve his mind, that his breeding and the raising of his family should not be left to chance, but that as much care at least should be taken thereof as is taken in the care and rearing of horses; that the family system is as antiquated as the old way of making shoes or homespun garments, and that the private property system is the root of all modern industrial evil. Therefore they say, let us control all the means of production, including human labor. Let us so regulate that labor that the fruits of it will go into the common treasury. Thence it may be distributed to the community according to the needs of each. In this way the amount of labor required from each individual will not exceed the absolute demands of health and recreation.

It is evident then that Socialism puts all its hopes of success in machinery. The Socialists are willing to take any community any day and to erect therein their wheels, and levers, and cranks, and pulleys and start in to grind out happiness by the wholesale. Of course the great Socialist writers draw a most flattering picture of what will happen to human nature once the wheels begin to go round. Just as soon as the present destructive system of individual competition is abolished, men will cease to be selfish, grasping, greedy, quarrelsome. When their bellies are full of bread and their days full of leisure they will become temperate, content and chaste, and submit willingly to the rules laid down by the scientists for the control of the appetites, and the proper conservation of the race. When the individual is merged in the State, and every office is open to every citizen, ambition and pride, and emulation and corruption and lying, will all fly this happy earth. No doubt there can be no thievery where there is no property, and no unchastity where there is no Sixth Commandment. But it is difficult to believe that there will be no ambition in a popular State.

The mainspring of Socialism is the destruction of individuality. The world is to be changed into a

gigantic workhouse or soup kitchen. Men and women shall obediently do the work set them to do as long as they are told to do it, and will as obediently turn over the fruit of their labor to the State. But what is this State? It is all very well to give big names and call it collective humanity or the common good, or such like trash, but the State to the ordinary man and woman in Socialism will be the factory boss, the overseer or some other officer appointed to supervise their work. Now whence shall these overseers, bosses or officers come? Some of the advanced thinkers of the sect believe that the time will arrive when men can be bred for various occupations as we breed dogs for hunting and horses for running, so that we would have men born master blacksmiths or master cobblers or master tailors—which, by the way, is a curious reversion to the old world idea that we could breed families for ruling as the bees breed queens. But until that time comes, the overseers, bosses, etc., must be elected, and will any one in his senses look at the world of reality and say that he would give up his life, his liberty and his happiness absolutely into the hands of even the best of our elected officers.

The fact of the matter is, that Socialism is the iridescent dream of men who do not condition themselves by the facts of human nature. It is more a religion than a political system, but neither as a religion nor as a political system has it any place in Labor Unions. The Labor Union has a very definite end, and that end is the improvement of the condition of the laboring man. It has very definite means to that end, namely, mutual support and assistance, and the principle of collective bargaining with employers. Now there are a great many people who think that if all the workingmen were teetotalers there condition would be very much improved. We have no doubt it would. We have no doubt that there is not a man in the Labor Unions in San Francisco that will not admit that the condition of the laboring men would be ameliorated if every Unionist took the pledge. Yet a Labor Union is not the place for a temperance propaganda. The end is all right, but the way, namely, the pledge, is outside the scope of the Union. The Unions exist to produce their end by a particular means; they would soon cease to exist if everybody could tie them up to every other patent means he might fancy.

Again, there is no doubt that if every member of the Union was a thoroughly religious man the material prosperity of the worker would be increased. Yet this most efficacious means of improvement is kept out of the Unions, and, as they are at present constituted, would infallibly wreck them if introduced. Moreover, every Democrat thinks that the welfare of the citizen is bound up with the success of his party, so the same thinks every Republican, yet good sense keeps party politics out of the unions. Now the Socialist system stands precisely in the same case. Its methods are not Union methods, therefore it has no place in the Union. It should be as rigidly kept out as other politics, because it is an element that will infallibly work the destruction of organized labor. Bishop Matz has rendered a service not only to Christianity, but to the men that toil. The association which he denounced, is a local affair, and is bitterly hostile to the cause and the leaders of Unionism, as we understand it. Their organs are filled with abuse of the men whose names are household words among the laborers of the land. Their most active propagandists are ex-priests whose abuse of the Church might be expected in an A. P. A. lodge, but not among men who cry so earnestly that they have nothing against any man's religion. Of course these outcasts will abuse and vilify the Bishop, but he can stand it. We congratulate him on his courage, and we believe his action will strengthen real Trades Unionism, as against the spurious article that now seems to be current in the Rocky Mountain region.—Leader.

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