

THE LAMBETH CONFERENCE: SOCIALISM, III.

It would be unfair to complain of the positive part of the report of the Lambeth Committee on Socialism that it is somewhat less distinct and more vague than the negative portion. It is comparatively easy to diagnose a disease, and to show that certain proposed remedies are sure to prove ineffectual. It is by no means an equally simple matter to show how acknowledged evils are to be remedied.

There can be no difficulty in affirming the general proposition of the report, "That labourers shall be encouraged in habits of thrift, in order that with the property thus acquired they may purchase land, or shares in societies for co-operative production." No doubt these things are very good; but in the first place, they will meet the case only of those who are inclined to be industrious, and in the second place, it is not yet conclusively proved that the condition of the peasant proprietor is as happy as many persons have believed.

On the matter of co-operation most students of Political Economy will agree with the Committee, who say, "They believe that it will be well to encourage working men to become possessors of small farms, and of shares in societies for co-operative production in trade and agriculture. They are not unaware that these societies have frequently failed, but they believe that the opinion is not without its weight, that if due care be taken to secure efficient and trustworthy managers, to pay them an adequate salary, and to treat them with a generous confidence, there is no reason why such undertakings should not become successful, as indeed they commonly are now, when their management is in competent hands."

All this is very true; but it hardly touches the most serious part of the problem. The schemes here advocated will certainly be beneficial to most of those working people who are already fairly well off, since it will help to guide their energies into more remunerative work; but they will hardly touch the really poor and needy.

The Committee refer to the objections brought against the capitalist or the man of ability using his property or his intelligence so as to make money by the labours of those who are poorer or less intelligent. But perhaps we have sufficiently dealt with this question already. It may be sufficient to add that only a system of pure Socialism can alter this state of things; and most modern systems, even of Socialism, do not profess anything so sweeping. If we once admit the principle that the skilled labourer may be paid more highly than the unskilled, we have affirmed the principle of inequality, and it must go through every portion of human society. If we deny this principle then we must have a dead uniformity and equality, which can be brought about only by a Procrustean system, which shall compel all persons to wear the same kind of clothes, and as far as they are able, to eat the same kind of food.

We have already pointed out that Socialism would destroy individuality and liberty in the community. We now see that, in various other ways, it is unworkable. It does not follow, however, that there is to be no interference, on the part of the State, with the affairs of individuals. The State does already interfere in many ways, and provided that a vexatious meddlesomeness is avoided, this interference may properly be carried further.

In what direction this interference should go, we shall better understand when we recall the actual needs of the poor; and they are, first and chiefly, decent habitations, daily bread and clothing, and a moderate amount of education. Perhaps, as subordinate to these, we might add what the committee call the protection of "the class known as proletarians from the evil effects of unchecked competition."

"The English Poor Law," says the report, "has long ago provided the bare necessities of life for those who cannot otherwise obtain them." Some time ago we drew attention to the need of a regular legal provision of the same kind in this country. Of course this is a very small part of what needs to be done. The workhouse is a poor prospect for any family or for any human being. Still, it is better than starvation.

Education, again, has been sufficiently provided, both here and in the mother country, for all classes in the community, although it may be some little time before all the young children of the poor can be got into the schools. There can be no doubt that, by degrees, the condition of the labouring classes will be sensibly raised and ameliorated by the spread of education and intelligence.

With regard to the housing of the poor it is believed that much has been done, but a great deal still remains to be done. And it does not seem very easy to have it done. Only the other day, a horrible kind of house, physically and morally—most unwholesome and full of the worst characters—was pulled down in this city after having been, for several years, not

only a hotbed of vice, as far as its inmates were concerned, but a nuisance to a large and respectable neighbourhood. The removal of the house was effected, apparently, with great difficulty and after many complaints. Now, if such were the case in a city of such manageable dimensions as Toronto, how enormous must be the obstacles to improvements of the same kind in London or in Paris!

And yet this is perhaps the most crying of all the evils by which the poor classes are afflicted. There can be no moral sentiment or conduct engendered among children who are brought up, grow up rather, without any knowledge of the simplest decencies of life. We are no foes to the rights of property. But property has duties as well as rights; and there should be vigorous inquisition into the state of the poorer tenements, especially in our great cities and towns, and if the present state of the law is insufficient, then new powers must be conferred upon the civic authorities that they may deal promptly and effectually with the evil. In the meantime, a good deal may be accomplished by those whose duties bring them into contact with the poor, and we believe that a great deal is accomplished by them. Clergy, medical men, Christian men and women who make it their business to visit the poor and the sick have successfully dealt with many cases of great misery; and it must be admitted that the public at large are seldom backward in assisting when any case of real distress is made known.

But this is not enough. Humanly speaking, this is leaving the relief of the suffering to accident. Besides, the remedies must go deeper. Various suggestions are made by the committee of the Lambeth Conference, nearly all good as far as they go. They believe that the State may properly "legalise the formation of Boards of Arbitration, to avert the disastrous effects of strikes. It may assist in the formation and maintenance of technical schools . . . The State may even encourage a wider distribution of property by the abolition of entail, where it exists"—a subject which requires more consideration than we can give it here—"and it may be questioned whether the system of taxation might not be varied in a sense more favourable to the claims of labourers than that which now exists."

In the latter part of the Report some good counsel is given as to the way in which the Church, the clergy, and other Christian labourers may encourage self-help among the hitherto improvident classes. Of course, this is the real remedy. But it must be admitted that many of the careless and thriftless are made more so by the dreary outlook which is before them. Many men who are now full of energy would probably be as nerveless as the worst if they only had as little to hope for.

There is only one point, and it is a matter of some delicacy, that we would further refer to. Ought not the State to interfere more than it does with the evidently idle men and women who do not work and will not work? The late Mr. Carlyle had strong opinions on this subject, and a very great and open contempt for those who would interfere with no human nuisance for fear of abridging human liberty. We are here on a course which is surrounded by difficulties. But the principle is already admitted. The police of Toronto ordered a certain class of undesirable persons to leave the city during the late Exhibition. This kind of thing needs to be carried further. We are not forgetting the preciousness of liberty. The freedom of the individual is sacred. But there is a certain class that can be treated only as children, and the sooner they can be made good children, or at least be prevented from behaving like bad children, the better.

But here we must stop. It is a burning question which we have dealt with, if there is any question in the world that can be so regarded. It is a question which we shall neglect at our peril. We may have done little here towards its solution; but we believe that nearly all the considerations which we have urged are worthy of being seriously weighed; and at least we have drawn attention to the gravity of the problems which are now demanding solution.

THERE is a talk of applying telephones to the infectious wards of the French hospitals, so as to enable the sick people, isolated in their contagious sufferings, to have the comfort of hearing their relatives' voices without any risk of conveying infection by an interview.

IN the love of a woman there is always a certain element of childishness, which has a reflex, if but temporary, action upon her whole nature. The phenomenon is due partly to the fact that she is under the dominant influence of a wholly natural instinct, partly to the fact that the object of her love is of stronger make than herself, mentally, spiritually, and physically. This sense of dependence and weakness, and, consequently, of extreme youth, remains until she has children. Then under the influence of peculiarly strong responsibilities, she gives her youth to them, and with it the plasticity of her nature.