

SOCIALISM.

WHAT is Socialism? What do Socialists want, and believe they have a right to insist upon? The fullest and most direct answers to these questions seem to be those contained in an article by Annie Besant, inserted in the July number, 1886, of the *Westminster Review*. She begins by quoting the saying of Professor Huxley, "that he would rather have been born a savage in one of the Fiji Islands than in a London slum," declares the Professor right, and gives reasons, not easily disputable by those who know what a London slum is, for the declaration. She then states the growth of the doctrine she expounds: the decay of religious belief among the classes interested, the influence of foreign writers, more especially the German, and the modifications of their doctrine by the habits of English life and their Democratic tendency, and says that "no mere abuse can shake the Socialist; no mere calling of names can move him; he holds a definite economic theory, which should neither be rejected without examination, nor accepted without study." She maintains that Socialists assent to all the sound doctrines of political economy, and more especially that capital is the unconsumed result of past and present labour: but they hold,—that individual property in land must disappear, that the soil on which a nation is born and lives ought to belong to the nation as a whole, and be cultivated by individuals and co-operative groups holding directly under the State; that capital always has been, and must be, obtained from the partial confiscation of the results of the labour of others, and is not found in the hands of the laborious and industrious, but of the idlers who have profited by such confiscation. She says,—the labourer is not free; nominally he may be, but in reality he is no more free than the slave. The slave is free to refuse to work, and to take in exchange the lash, the prison, and the grave, and such freedom only has the labourer: if he refuses to work he must take the lash of hunger, the prison of the workhouse, or, on continued refusal, the gaol. The remedy is the abolition of the landlord and the capitalist. Interest on capital has no place in Socialism, strongly as it protests against the whole system of which landlords and capitalists form an integral part, it reserves its uttermost reprobation for the theory which justifies a class of the latter in living solely on money drawn as interest on investments. So long as capital remains in private hands interest will be demanded and paid perforce for its use, and so long there will remain an idle class, a burden on the industrious who may labour for their support. Socialism aims at rendering the existence of an idle class impossible. Healthy adults will have to work for the things they require. The very young, the old, the sick, will be free from labour; but for the strong and the mature no bread of idleness, no sponging upon other people. In thus condemning an idle class, Socialism does not assail the individuals who now compose it; they are not to blame for the social conditions in which they have been born; it is one of the most hopeful signs for the Socialistic movement that many who are working in it belong to the very classes that will be abolished by it; they can do no good by throwing their fortunes away, and plunging into the present competitive struggle; all they can do is to live simply, and use their position as a pedestal on which to place their advocacy of Socialism, and employ their money in Socialist propaganda. There is no fear that individualism will be crushed. Exhausting toil and ever-growing anxiety, these crush out individuality and stifle genius. Socialism will give leisure as well as work to all, lift the heavy burden of care from all shoulders, and allow time to think and to endeavour. She adopts the doctrine of Malthus, except his objection to early marriages, for which she would substitute prudential restraint, and twits him quietly with having eleven children, thinks the doctrine is essential to the success of Socialism, and that highly educated women, full of interest in public work, and taking their share of public duty, will not consent to spend year after year of their prime in nothing but expecting, bearing, and suckling babies, and she concludes with the following emphatic passage:

"A glance backward over the history of our own country since the Reform Bill of 1832 opened the gate of political power to those outside the sacred circle of the aristocracy will tell how an unconscious movement towards Socialism has been steadily growing in strength. Our Factory Acts, our Mines Regulation Acts, our Land Acts, all show the set of the current. The idea of the State as an outside power is fading, and the idea of the State as an organised community is coming into prominence. In the womb of time the new organism is growing; shall the new birth come in peace or in revolution, heralded by patient endeavour, or by the roar of cannon? This one thing I know, that come it will, whether men work for it or hinder; for all the mighty forces of evolution make for Socialism, for the establishment of the brotherhood of man."

The article, of which I have endeavoured to give the substance in a condensed form, is inserted in the "independent section" of the *Review* set apart "for the reception of able articles which, though harmonising with its general spirit, may contain opinions at variance with the particular ideas or measures it advocates." Very able indeed the writer shows herself in the advocacy of the views and intentions of Socialism, and it is well that these should be widely known, for they concern us all. Forewarned is forearmed, and knowing what they are we shall be the better prepared to deal with them, and they strike at the very root of civilisation and progress in abolishing the right of property, and forbidding a man's enjoying or leaving to his children the enjoyment of the fruit of his labour, which is the great motive to exertion, bodily or mental.

To all fair means of promoting the more general distribution of wealth and diminishing the hardships of poverty,—by representation, by the association of workers, and by laws such as the writer refers to as passed by the British Parliament, there is no objection, and I rejoice with her at the spirit which led to their enactment. The writer has told us what she wishes for, but she has not told us by what means her wishes are to be

carried into effect, or what are the enactments by which she would provide for the division of all existing wealth equally among all, furnishing all with work equally well paid, and compelling them to perform it. The raising of the common fund, and the division of it equally among all would be no easy matter, and requires explanation. The scheme of general confiscation would probably be resisted. There must be government of some kind to enforce it, and we have a right to know how such government is to be constituted and maintained. The proper carrying out of the Malthusian doctrine which the writer declares (very truly) to be essential to the success of Socialism, would require some rather difficult and delicate legislation. With every wish to believe in her good intentions, I can hardly think the writer expects to induce the millionaire to divide his millions with the labourers by moral suasion; and indeed her last paragraph would seem to imply—"quietly if possible, forcibly if we must." There may be a gentle touch of dynamite in her "come it will." To me her scheme seems absurd as it is dangerous, and to be possible only if and when it shall please heaven to endue all of us with equal strength of arm and brain, with the same powers, wants, and wishes, and with such perfect faith in the Socialist dispensation as will preclude all desire of progress or improvement of condition. What may come to pass in Europe, with its ever increasing population and apparent want of useful employment for it, I do not know: the prospect is not bright, and even *Punch* speaks anxiously in words and cartoon, and the Laureate denounces it in patriotic and prophetic verse. But "there's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we may," and that shaping will be for good. In America there is less reason for anxiety. The Knights of Labour do not adopt Socialism or anarchy; and in *Harper's Weekly* of 6th November last there is an excellent article by P. M. Arthur, Grand Chief of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, in which he maintains that there is no antagonism between labour and capital which cannot be easily overcome. He says, "Every man of industrious habits may hope to become a capitalist; indeed, the desire to accumulate is one of the most powerful instruments for the regeneration of society, it supplies the basis for individual energy and activity. I have no sympathy with men who claim that might is right, and that the rich owe the poor a living." Let us try to diminish the amount of poverty, and to mitigate its evils by legislation in the spirit of that referred to with approval by Annie Besant, and by all other means that wisdom may suggest; there is the highest authority for doing this, by the exercise of brotherly love and Christian charity in the highest sense of the words, but none for confiscation, robbery, or violence. Poverty has its hardships, and we must strive earnestly to remove or diminish them; but difference of wealth or station has but a very limited influence on human happiness, and is a far less evil than what Socialism proposes to substitute for it:

"Order is heaven's first law, and this confest,
Some are—nay, must be,—greater than the rest;
More rich, more wise; but who infers from hence
That such are happier, shocks all common sense."

W.

SHAKESPEARE.

IN a contribution to *THE WEEK* of 27th January last, the fact is propounded that Shakespeare "has but one solitary romantic hero, Henry V.," (is the absence of all others kinds of hero to be inferred?) "but all his female characters are noble."

In the interest of what is really true, it must be submitted, with all deference, that Shakespeare does not give authority for any such sweeping contrast between the sexes. According to this theory, as he drew from the life of his own day, the inferior sex of that period must have been deplorably over-weighted. Yet we hear of some strong men in Elizabeth's reign too. However, he was not immoderate; even he had his bounds; he was satisfied with one generation; he has many daughters—of fathers, that is—charming, loveable, pitiable, faulty, as the case might be, just as it is in the human nature from which he drew. But he has very few mothers, and two of these, *Lady Macbeth*, the murderess,

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me;
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from its boneless gums,
And dashed its brains out, had I sworn, as you
Have done to this,

and the step-mother, would-be poisoner, queen, in "*Cymbeline*." *Miranda*, *Olivia*, *Viola*, *Isabella*, *Portia*, *Rosalind*, *Helena*, *Imogen*, *Cordelia*, *Ophelia*, *Desdemona*—what an unmatched invention of names, there is rhythm in the very recitation—are motherless, and more might be named. But Shakespeare's peculiarities, in this direction, do not end here. If we are to judge him by what he makes his characters say—and by that rule he always is and must be judged, for there is no other, and by that, in part, he has got his all-deserved immense fame—he was possessed by the idea that the degeneracy of the child, or his marital ill-fortune, is to be traced to the conjugal infidelity of the mother. In act ii., scene 5, of "*Cymbeline*," *Posthumus* says,

Is there no way for men to be, but women
Must be half-workers? We are bastards all;
And that most venerable man, which I
Did call my father, was I know not where
When I was stamped; some coiner with his tools
Made me a counterfeit; yet my mother seemed
The Dian of that time: so doth my wife
The nonpareil of this.

And these lines are followed by others consisting of an indictment against women in general, so intensely bitter, so exhaustive in its accusations, and summed up with

All faults that may be named, nay that hell knows,