

The Social Problem.

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The Social Problem must be mastered before a rational attempt to solve it can be made. If quiet is to be restored to our distracted age, the principles involved in the agitation must be understood and the causes of the frequent eruptions known. But little reflection is needed to get rid of that shallow view which confounds the Social Problem with socialism. The one is a problem, the other is its proposed solution by means of some form of collectivism; and it is strange that the problem and the solution could ever be taken as synonymous. Every deeper view likewise disposes of the theory that the Social Problem is the same as the labor question. The latter is included in the Social Problem as a very essential factor, but only as the building includes the foundation on which it rests. The labor question usually pertains to material interests; but besides these our problem involves the interests of education, of ethics and religion. It is truly social, involving all the factors and all the concerns of society; and it is the Social Problem of the age because the absorbing question of society.

The problem arises from the inequality in the social conditions; and it would lose its force if it were proved that this inequality is just and necessary. Now men are agitated by such queries as these: Are the existing inequalities right? Are they inevitable? Have they their source in nature and are they the product of natural law? Or did God ordain them, so that pious resignation is a duty? Or are they social institutions, society having made them and being responsible for them? If the latter is the case, then society can also change these inequalities.

Absolute equality is a dream. Neither by nature nor by achievement are men equal. An enforced equality would require the strong to descend to the level of the weak, since these cannot rise to the standard of the strong. The social workers, who are at the same time thinkers, seek no Utopian equality; but they insist that justice to the individual and to society demands all possible equality of opportunity; that is, social reform aims to establish such conditions as will give to all equal advantages for developing their powers and running successfully the race of life. With the educational, moral, industrial and social opportunities equal to all, each will be thrown on his resources, and be responsible for the result. No circumstance, but personal effort, is to determine the place of men. So reasonable is this equality of opportunity, so urgently it is needed, that it is rapidly becoming the ideal of social reformers.

It is evident that laborers are the chief agitators, for the reason that they are the principal sufferers from the actual or supposed ills which spring from the inequalities in human conditions. They insist on a change; and in this insistence we behold the working of certain elemental forces of human nature. Men naturally strive to preserve their being and to attain well-being; this is simply a struggle to survive, and to survive under the best possible conditions. Those who think the present agitations a product of demagogues, and treat them as artificial, foreign to human nature, external and superficial, and destined to vanish when men come to themselves, have failed to fathom the meaning of the most remarkable uprising of our generation.

We have passed to that stage of progress in which the true claims of the individual are as fully recognized as ever, but when the social claims and duties are insisted on as never before. Where a false individualism has prevailed, we do not put an equally false and extreme communism, but we demand a socialization in the domain in while the interests and rights of society are supreme. We demand for the individual what belongs to the individual, and with equal emphasis demand for society what belongs to society. In grading upward, not leveling downward, the rights of labor and of capital are equally sought.

Home Reunion Notes.

SIR,—I give this week the new President's address at the annual meeting of our Society, held last month. NELSON.

The Bishop of Truro, in his address, first expressed his pleasure at being allowed to take any part in a society which had at heart that which was so near to the heart of our Lord. Some years ago, when he was at Leeds, he tried to arrange a meeting with some Nonconformists, and he was in constant correspondence with a leading Nonconformist layman of Yorkshire. At last he was forced to say, "You do not take the interest in this question of Reunion which I do." To which came the reply, "No, I do not. Man is by nature a disagreeing animal. You will never get us to be at one. We were born with disagreement in the midst of us." Was that so? He thought this Society existed in order to disprove that. He might perhaps be allowed to mention an incident which occurred to him before he went to Leeds, to illustrate the truth that we were

getting nearer each other. A very prominent lay member of the Baptist community remarked to him, "Do you know the history of the spiritual life in this parish? Some ten years before you came, the religious life of the place was at a low ebb, so all the Nonconformists agreed to spend a week together in earnest prayer. The Church of England, which was poor in numbers and weak in spiritual influence, was asked to join, but declined. It was the only unrepresented body among us. We spent the week in intense prayer to God. What was the answer? The first answer was given in the coming of your predecessor, a devoted and gifted parish priest, and ever since, Dissent has been going down and down before the Church." He was inclined to think that that same movement has been going on a much wider scale than most people are aware of. If there was, then, this centripetal power amongst us, counteracting the ever-widening centrifugal forces, it showed that God was leading on the Church and all Christians at the present time. Just as we grew nearer to the central Object of our worship, we must, even on mechanical laws, grow near to each other. Christianity was shorn and crippled in many of its main spiritual gifts by the breaking asunder of spiritual life, and we would have far more spiritual force if we were all one. Every religious community on'y continued to breed disciples by the spiritual life that was within it; we wanted that life within the Church. He thought that few Churchmen had any idea of the grandeur, the beauty, and the tenderness which the Church would display to God and man, when all who loved our blessed Lord were at one together. Reunion would bring into one organic body all the scattered and squandered powers of God, which were now like meteors, not like stars, going their own way, and threatening danger all around. We should have a great deal more spiritual force if it was not wasted and dissipated by separation. The spiritual power of A would be greater if B were organically connected with him; but B, being at the present time separated from him by prejudice and ignorance, A, no less than B, was not the force he was meant to be. So it was, not only that we should embrace in the Church the spiritual gifts that were now scattered, but each man's spiritual gifts would be more intense and vigorous if they were held in conjunction with all the other spiritual gifts amongst us. What a gain it would be if men like Dr. Dale and Dr. Milligan saw exactly as we saw. We might be quite sure that Dissent was now holding gifts which were meant for the one Church. Thus, there was the use of extempore prayer among Nonconformists, which was not much taught, and still less practised, among the greater part of the members of the Church of England. Who had been in company with devout Nonconformists without being struck by the real gift of spirituality which was poured forth in extempore prayer from their lips? Without desiring in the least to break with formalities of prayer, and liturgy, he (the Bishop) held that we had wants outside these, which could be expressed by the greater use of extempore prayer, which Nonconformists had studied more carefully than we had. Then, again, liberality in giving was more pronounced among Nonconformists than with members of the Church of England. These spiritual powers, which belonged to this or that person, to this or that community, in spite of separation, not because of it, would not reach their fullest development and reflect the mind of the Master, until the Church was completely at one.

The Discipline of Suffering.

Many years ago a traveller through a South American forest lost his way; fever-stricken and parched with thirst, he stumbled blindly along, and at last lay down, hopeless and despairing, to die. A sunbeam struggling through the leafy dome, glanced on a hidden pool; the sparkle caught the eye of the dying man; by a supreme effort he reached the water's edge, and, stooping, drank long and deeply, only to sink back with a groan at the irony of fate, which, instead of the sweet, refreshing draught for which he longed, had mocked his dying lips with one bitter as the water of Marah. Driven by the frenzy of thirst, he drank again and yet again, and at last fell into a sleep from which he awoke to find life and health restored. A cinchona tree had fallen into the pool; and thus was saved not only the life of that one traveller, but through the discovery then made of the virtues of Peruvian bark, health and happiness have been restored to thousands. In this story we see a parable of the discipline of suffering.

One of the stings of affliction is found in the question that rises up so continually—Why is this sorrow laid upon me? Why must I endure this pain? I was so happy; why this cloud of bereavement? This "why" has tried the faith of sufferers in all ages; it added to the burden of Job's trials. With its constant iteration—like the buzzing of some insect round a sick man's head—it vexes many a troubled heart to-day. Why is suffering permitted—why? A full answer cannot be given. "We see through a glass darkly." We are like children gathering shells on the seashore—all our