

LESSON XVII.

Socialism.

History → The most radical proposal for the cure of all society's ills is socialism. Few movements have been more widely discussed and at the same time more vaguely defined than socialism. It is a living movement, changing with every change in the mental horizon or material conditions of the time. It is variously colored by personal experience and by different racial and industrial surroundings. It has been an opposition policy, and so under its banner have marched the most motley forces, at one only in that all were opposed to things as they are. Some plutocrats use the term to cover any attack whatever on vested rights or vested wrongs, while some well meaning sentimentalists, "parlor socialists" as Mr. Roosevelt termed them, use the word vaguely to denote their half-baked yearnings.

The term socialism may most easily be made clear by considering it in relation to the present system of private property and individual competition, which the socialist sums up as capitalism. Socialism is in the first place an indictment of capitalism. The indictment is urged hotly and with unsparing detail, in ponderous treatise and fleeting pamphlet, through party organs and on party platforms. Day after day and week after week vigorously edited journals keep up a running fire on every weak spot of capitalism. Night after night, on countless street corners, soap-box orators condemn the existing order root and branch. It is judged by its fruits, and its fruits are charged to be waste and wretchedness and want. All is for the worst in this worst of possible worlds: private property and devil-take-the-hindmost have failed utterly to provide an abiding foundation for the social structure.

Socialism in the second aspect presents an analysis of capitalism. Its origin is accounted for, and its present working described. An explanation is given of the way in which the workman is exploited, and the tendency of existing social forces is studied.

From a third viewpoint socialism presents a substitute for capitalism, a forecast of the ideal co-operative commonwealth that is to be. The ideal of the future, of course, varies with the analysis of the present; prescription follows diagnosis. But, neglecting minor variations, socialism in this aspect may be defined as the demand for collective ownership and use of the