

Moreover, certain doctrines have been set forth by Socialists and others regarding profit and interest, but these are questions to be solved by the moralist rather than by the economist. It may be well to note the fact that the condemnation of interest so eloquently expressed by Mr. Ruskin, is fully in accord with the ideas of the cultured minds of antiquity, and indeed, of the Christian Church up to the 15th century.

With regard to the scheme for the nationalisation of the land, it may be considered quite apart from any connection with a Socialistic system as a mere question of justice, and in fact the so-called "scientific Socialists" quietly ignore the importance attached to this reform by its more zealous reformers. I do not propose to enter here upon the defence of this proposal, but would refer all interested parties to the admirable work of Mr. Henry George, "Progress and Poverty." I will merely point out that a broad distinction is clearly drawn between the earth with its natural products, "the primitive capital, the Divine inheritance of man," and property which to a great extent is the direct result of man's labour, and it is contended that one generation does not possess the right to barter property to which future generations will have an equal right, or to deliver up land to an individual proprietor to be disposed of in perpetuity according to his will, though prescription may be a comfortable convention for society to endure, yet it is quite inadequate to establish any absolute right to property unjustly obtained or unwarrantably donated in the first instance. For, it is Mr. Herbert Spencer who asks the question, "at what per cent. a year does wrong become right?"

In studying this subject it should be remembered that it is not a mere reckoning of profit and loss resulting from the transaction, but a fair estimation of the righteousness of the case. A hearty protest must be entered against that commercial spirit which computes all the great questions of the day according to some selfish and low utilitarian standard. Socialists are quite willing to allow that with the decline of the fierce competition now raging, and the more equitable distribution of property, the sum total of wealth produced may undergo a sensible reduction. But the general happiness of people being enhanced, and the unrestrained pursuit of mammon discouraged, they would deem the gain far greater than the loss. And surely this opinion should commend itself to every true Christian.

Before people join in a wholesale condemnation of Socialists, it would be advisable for them to form some acquaintance with the purest manifestations of Socialism as set forth in standard works on the subject. There has lately appeared in England an excellent work entitled "Socialism of to-day," a translation from the French of M. Emile de Laveleye, which gives a comprehensive view of Socialism the world over. A full and philosophical exposition of Christian Socialism may be found in "Le Régne social du Christianisme," a book written by another eminent French thinker, M. Huet. For those who are more interested in

the purely economical side of the question, I should recommend Toynbee's "Industrial Revolution," and Montague's "Limits of Individual Liberty."

Another old charge that is often brought against Socialists is that they expect to make men virtuous by act of parliament. The real fact is that the State is regarded as a powerful instrument which may be utilized for beneficial ends, yet social perfection is believed to be attainable only after a long course of mental and moral training. "The moral order," says M. Huet, "will ever hold the first place, yet without economical reform the moral order will never reach completion." And even professed Atheists, like William Morris and Dr. Aveling, of the English Socialist League, declare the movement to be pre-eminently an educated one, and expect more from the exercise of individual virtue than from the supervision of the government.

We may readily grant Mr. Herbert Spencer's dictum that government is an evil, in so far as its very existence predicates the presence of vice and crime to be punished and restrained, but in the present state of society it would hardly be safe to abolish all restraint of law and compulsory order. And Socialists now ask for greater interference on the part of the state, only that in the time to come when people have become more virtuous and dutiful its salutary provisions may be no longer required. In that happy condition of affairs, if it is ever to be reached in this world, we may hope to approach that ideal state of Anarchy where all is peace and contentment, and where individual existences are so impregnated with altruistic notions that egoist aggressions are unknown.

The object of this article has not been to offer a complete view of the principles and action of Socialism, nor to answer fully all the objections raised against it. If, even to a small degree, the spread of serious misconception regarding one of the most interesting developments of human ideas has been prevented, the design of the writer has been fully accomplished. I can well imagine some easy-going person asking in astonishment what all these conflicting theories have to do with himself, with something very like an echo of the vain old individualist excuse, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The fact remains that every one is responsible to the extent of his or her power and influence for the injustice, the sin, and the misery, which desecrate God's fair earth. And it is a positive duty, particularly incumbent on all Christians, to study the remedies proposed, and in some way strive to alleviate the evils of the age.

In the emphatic words of Mr. Ruskin, "You have thought things would right themselves, or that it was God's business to right them, not yours. Peremptorily, it is yours. Not, observe, to get your rights, but to put things to rights."

EXON.

