

# The Odd Trick

By E. B. Bax.

WE not infrequently hear a certain school of sentimentalists sneer at Socialism as holding before men a merely low sensuous ideal of existence—of good living, etc. etc. We are accused by such of neglecting the higher ideals of Humanity for the affairs of the stomach and of still more despised organs. The usual and obvious retort to this sort of thing is the *ad hominem* one, that the persons who make the charge are themselves sufficiently well cared for in these lower matters to be able to afford to ignore them and turn their attention to things above. But though the gist of the matter is often contained in the above retort, it is, as it stands, crude, unformulated, and impolite, even if it were always applicable, which it is not. Let us therefore for the nonce treat these people seriously and develop the answer to their objection in formulated fashion. For in truth this objection springs not merely from deliberate hypocrisy or from thoughtlessness, but has its root in the ethical code in which they have been brought up. This ethical code teaches them that all the highest ideals of man's existence are attainable by a voluntary effort on the part of the individual irrespective of his material surroundings, which are matters of small concern. The body is in fact a thing rather to be ashamed of than anything else.

I would not say that all our sentimental friends carry their sentiment to this extent, but that this principle—the principle of Christian Dualism as opposed to Pagan Monism—underlies their moral consciousness there can be no doubt. It is of course true that this view is facilitated by comfortable bodily conditions. It is easier to think meanly of the "body" when the "body" is all right than when it is not. And this very fact gives us, as we shall know directly, the key to the Socialist position on the subject. There are, however, not a few persons who in all sincerity hold the view that in the overcoming of the body—in the minimization of all bodily satisfaction—is to be found the portal to the higher life of man, and who act up to their professions. Now it should be observed that to all who earnestly and sincerely accept the current ethical basis, the body still remains an end, although they profess to ignore it. It is an end to them as much as to the epicure and the libertine, although in another way.

Now the difference between this orthodox and the Socialist way of viewing human life is, that the Socialist, while not pretending to ignore the body, yet wishes that it should cease to be the main end of human life. At present that satisfaction of personal bodily wants fills the mental horizon of the immense majority of human beings, the only alternative being with those would-be virtuous individuals whose mental horizon is filled, to a large extent at least, with the idea of the suppression of these same bodily wants. That the first of these conditions is unfavorable to the development of a higher life, be it moral, intellectual, or artistic, few would dispute. That the second is scarcely less so is equally obvious on a little reflection. For in the first place the continued struggle against natural wants, to live on next to nothing, to bear the greatest privations, in itself draws off vast stores of moral energy which is wasted on mere suppression. But if the victory is gained, if the man does not succumb in the process, if his devotion to his higher aim, of whatever nature it may be, is so exceptionally great as to carry him through, what has he gained and what has he not lost? He is purified through suffering, says the Christian. But in how many cases he metaphorically leaves his skin behind in the process, in how many cases he has lost an essential part of himself, those know who have had much intercourse with or have studied the lives of the exceptional men who have successfully struggled with adversity, and who have observed the sourness, the one-sidedness, the twistedness, so to say, of character thence resulting. No one can fail to admire and to honor the strength of purpose which enables a man to pursue a high aim in the midst of privations; but no one who looks at the matter without prejudice and in the light of broad human inter-

ests, can honestly say that the man is better as man for the privations through which he is come, even though he has accomplished his life-work in spite of them. Instances of this may be found in Chatterton, Beethoven, etc. Of course we leave out of account here the fact that under modern economic conditions it is not a case of being contented with a little which is at least there, but of a desperate and exhausting life struggle to obtain sufficient to sustain life at all. We do so, as we are addressing not so much the avowed opponents of Socialism as those who, while professing to sympathize in a manner with its aims, have lingering prejudices in favor of the ascetic or shall I say the "austere republican" theory of life, and who therefore view with disfavor the stress modern Socialism lays on the satisfaction of mere material wants.

Even the sentimental moralist in question must admit that at the present time the end-purpose of life is for the majority of men the satisfaction of natural personal wants. There are not a few, it is true, who pursue gain for the sake of gain, but this is generally after they have satisfied their animal wants. Now the apparent ideal of certain sentimental moralists I have heard talk, is an insurance against absolute destitution, and the rigid repression of all further desires over and above this minimum. The Positivists to a great extent hold this view. Such a state of things they think might be attainable (by a kind of state-socialism we suppose) within the framework of present society. The theory, therefore, is not distasteful to those who see that capitalism is unstable and indeed impossible to last as at present constituted, but who would willingly stave off the complete overthrow of the system. The latter are anxious merely to retain their monopoly of the good things of life, but they find a useful ally in the introspective moralist who winces at the idea of removing the causes of moral evil for fear of depriving the individual of the opportunity of "resisting temptation, and who wants to keep him deprived of the comforts and conveniences of life that he may show his strength of mind in being able to do without them, shutting their eyes to the fact that they thereby perpetuate moral evil.

It is the scientific Socialist who alone seriously wishes to lead men to higher aims than merely sensual ones, while caring not one jot for the empty moral gymnastics which are the end of the introspective moralist. He sees that his ideal, human happiness, and that in the highest sense, is realizable rather in the enjoyment of all than in the restraint of each, even in the matter of mere material wants, and that the corrupting influence of luxury hitherto has mainly resided in the fact that it was not enjoyed by all. And his theory is based on knowledge of the "nature of things."

To the sick man what is the highest ideal? Health. His whole horizon of aspiration is filled in with the notion of health. To him health is synonymous with happiness. He recovers his health and he finds now that there is something beyond that horizon—that over the mountains there are also oxen. Health now becomes a matter of course, which he accepts as such and does not think about; his mental horizon is now occupied with other objects. Had he remained sick he might have been resigned, but health would still have irresistibly presented itself to him as the ideal goal of life. So it is with the completion of health, which consists in the full, the adequate satisfaction of bodily wants. So long as they remain a desideratum for the majority of mankind, the majority of mankind will continue to regard them as the one end of the heroic ascetic, who despises such low concerns. Let the mass of men once have free access to the means of satisfaction, and they will then for the first time feel the need of higher objects in life.

As a matter of fact, it is a trite observation that all the "higher life" of the world has been carried on by those classes who have been free from the presence of material wants, not by those who have

been deprived of them or who have renounced them. What did the really consistent Christian ascetics—the St. Antonies of the fourth century, for example—accomplish beyond seeing visions, performing astounding feats of self-privation, etc.? Were they more than moral mountebanks? Do we not find, on the contrary, that the monks who really were historians, philosophers, etc., sprang from the wealthy Benedictines and other orders whose discipline was "lax," who kept a well-filled refectory, whose morality was said to be questionable, and who lead the intellectual life of the middle ages. So long as monasticism remained ascetic, intellectual life within the monasteries was impossible. Bodily cravings occupied men's whole attention. Another and still more striking instance of how the fact of every possible sensual enjoyment being within reach forces the mind to seek satisfaction in something which if it is not intellectual is at least non-sensual, is that of the tyrannos of the ancient city, or the wealthy noble, the provincial governor, the proconsul or prefect of the Roman Empire. No one can adequately conceive nowadays of the luxury and sensuous pleasure in which such characters as these literally weltered—of the gorgeous marble palaces, of the Persian coverings, of the Babylonian couches, the wines, dishes, and spices from every quarter of the known world, of the most well-favored concubines that could be procured for money from Europe, from Asia and from Africa—yet, strange to say, the possessor and enjoyer of all these things was never happy unless risking them all and his life included on the barren chance (in the first instance mentioned) of conquering another city, or (in the second) of intriguing for the purple, the attainment of which experience had taught, in nine cases out of ten, meant death within a few months. It was not that the conquest of the city or the ascent of the throne added to his luxury, which would have probably been impossible—this was not his object, but that having already his fill of all sensuous pleasures he looked for something more, and this something more he found, in accordance with the manners of his age, in the notion of glory, the glory of founding a dynasty, or of being saluted absolute master of the world. We see a similar thing nowadays in the tradesmen in possession of all that wealth can purchase, and in absence of all intellectual resources, who, also in accordance with the manners of his age, finds his "something more" in commercial "success," which he continues to pursue for its own sake.

(Continued in next issue.)

## PLATFORM Socialist Party of Canada

We, the Socialist Party of Canada, affirm our allegiance to, and support of, the principles and programme of the revolutionary working class.

Labor, applied to natural resources, produces all wealth. The present economic system is based upon capitalist ownership of the means of production, consequently, all the products of labor belong to the capitalist class. The capitalist is, therefore, master; the worker a slave.

So long as the capitalist class remains in possession of the reins of government all the powers of the State will be used to protect and defend its property rights in the means of wealth production and its control of the product of labor.

The capitalist system gives to the capitalist an ever-swelling stream of profits, and to the worker, an ever-increasing measure of misery and degradation.

The interest of the working class lies in setting itself free from capitalist exploitation by the abolition of the wage system, under which this exploitation, at the point of production, is cloaked. To accomplish this necessitates the transformation of capitalist property in the means of wealth production into socially controlled economic forces.

The irrespressible conflict of interest between the capitalist and the worker necessarily expresses itself as a struggle for political supremacy. This is the Class Struggle.

Therefore, we call all workers to organize under the banner of the Socialist Party of Canada, with the object of conquering the political powers, for the purpose of setting up and enforcing the economic programme of the working class, as follows:

1. The transformation, as rapidly as possible, of capitalist property in the means of wealth production (natural resources, factories, mills, railroads, etc.) into collective means of production.
2. The organization and management of industry by the working class.
3. The establishment, as speedily as possible, of production for use instead of production for profit.