

SOCIALISM.

THE report of the Conference Committee on Socialism is, in our judgment, the ablest one presented, the hand of the Bishop of Manchester, Chairman, is shown in its clearness and practicality.

This Committee was directed to report "on the Church's practical work in relation to Socialism." It will be desirable, therefore, in the first place, to ascertain, if possible, what is the meaning of Socialism. This, however, is not easy, as the word is used at present in very different senses. When Proudhon was asked, What is Socialism? he replied, "It is every aspiration towards the improvement of society." Laveleye remarks upon this answer, that "Proudhon's definition is too wide—it omits two characteristics. In the first place, every socialistic doctrine aims at introducing greater equality into social conditions; and secondly, it tries to realise those reforms by the action of the law or the State." So far, however, as this definition makes the interference of the State a necessary element of Socialism, it is not universally accepted. Schaffle, for instance says:—"The Alpha and Omega of Socialism is the transformation of private competing capitals into a united collective capital;" and T. Kirup, in a thoughtful article on Socialism in the last edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, affirms that "the central aim of Socialism is to terminate the divorce of the workers from the natural sources of subsistence and of culture;" and, again, he says, "the essence of the theory consists in this—associated production, with a collective capital, with the view to an equitable distribution." Speaking broadly, then, and with reference to such definitions as the preceding, any scheme of social reconstruction may be called Socialism which aims at uniting labour and the instruments of labour (land and capital), whether by means of the State, or of the help of the rich, or of the voluntary co-operation of the poor.

Between Socialism, as thus defined, and Christianity there is obviously no necessary contradiction. Christianity sets forth no theory of the distribution of the instruments or the products of labour; and if, therefore, some Socialists are found to be in opposition to the Christian religion, this must be due to the accidents and not to the essence of their social creed. Some Socialists are atheists, others advocate loose doctrines as to family ties, others, like the Anarchists, seek to realise their aims, so far as they have any, by undisguised murder and robbery, while according to some, the very possession of private property is a usurpation and a wrong to the community. With such men the Christian Church can form no alliance. And yet at the same time with what they profess to be their central aim, the improvement of the material and moral condition of the poor, she must have the deepest sympathy. Their methods, indeed, are not hers. Spoliation or injustice in any form is abhorrent alike to her sentiment and belief. She has no faith in the inherent power of

humanity to redeem itself from selfishness. She seeks to make men prosperous and wise and good, not by the force of laws or bayonets, but by the change of individual hearts, and the introduction of a new brotherhood in Christ.

Not the less, however, is she bound, following the teaching of her Master, to aid every wise endeavour which has for its object the material and moral welfare of the poor. Her Master taught her that all men are brethren, not because they share the same blood, but because they have a common Heavenly Father. He further taught her that if any of the members of this spiritual family were greater, richer, or better than the rest, they were bound to use their special means or ability in the service of the whole. "He that is greatest among you," He said, "shall be your servant"—and that for a special reason, because each disciple was bound to imitate his Divine Master, "Who came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The Church's practical duty, then, towards Socialism, must be determined by the answer to this question, will the union of labour and the instruments of labour tend to improve the material, mental, and moral condition of mankind? Experience seems to show that it will.

It may still, however, be a question, what is the wisest method of bringing about this union between labour and its instruments. Two principal schemes have been proposed:—

(1) That laborers shall be encouraged in habits of thrift, in order that with the property thus acquired they may purchase land, or shares in societies for co-operative production.

(2) That the State shall take possession of the whole land and capital of any country, with or without compensation to their former owners; that the property thus nationalised shall be held in trust for the community by the State, the Commune, or the association, and employment of the common capital, requiring work from each man according to his ability, and bestowing property upon each man according to his needs, or the value of his labour. Minor modifications of this scheme, tending to bring it into closer harmony with the existing state of society, have been proposed by some Socialistic teachers, but still it may be taken as a substantially correct representation of the ultimate aim of very many.

To this second method of uniting labour and its instruments the Committee would urge the following objections:—(1) If full compensation were given to the present holders of property the scheme could hardly be realised, while if full compensation were withheld it would become one of undisguised spoliation. (2) If Government were able to acquire just possession of the whole property of a community, it is difficult to see how the affairs of any great commercial undertaking could be conducted by the State or the Commune with the energy, economy, and sagacious foresight which are necessary to secure success. (3) If all men had to work under State or the Communal inspection and compulsion, it

would be difficult for them to retain freedom, the sense of parental responsibility, and those numerous traits of individuality which gives richness to the human character.

The Committee strongly recommend the adoption of the first-named method. They believe that it will be well to encourage working men to become possessors of small farms, and of shares in societies for co-operative production in trade and agriculture. They are not unaware that these societies have frequently failed, but they believe that the opinion is not without its weight, and if due care be taken to secure efficient and trustworthy managers, to pay them an adequate salary, and to treat them with a generous confidence, there is no reason why such undertakings should not become successful, as indeed they commonly are now, when their management is in competent hands.

OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED.

THE report on Socialism above quoted goes on to deal with difficulties raised as follows:

Two objections have been frequently advanced against this method of diminishing the present distress:—1st, that it is unjust to let any one but the labourer obtain possession of any part of the products of his labour; and 2ndly, that no man of property or ability ought to seek personal profit from the employment of his special advantages, or ought even to be allowed to become the permanent owner of either land or capital.

The first objection is not tenable. The Committee hold that it is just (1) to pay high wages for exceptional ability; (2) to compensate for his abstinence the man who refrains from consuming his own share of the products of labour, and by so doing makes it possible to maintain and increase the capital of the community; (3) to allow any one to convert his savings into the form of capital or estate.

The second objection is really founded upon the general spirit of our Lord's teaching—viz., that greatness, ability, or wealth should be made the means of service to the poor and weak without special fee or reward. The Committee fully admit that this is the ideal set before us by our Divine Master, and that it is the end towards which we should press, as quickly as the conquest of selfishness will allow us. But they hold that there is no surer cause of failure in practical affairs than the effort to act an ideal which has not yet been realised. If the Church is to act safely as well as sublimely, she must take the self-regarding motives with her on the long path by which she advances towards the perfect life of love. She must not assume the existence of what does not exist. She must not, like the Anarchists, destroy the whole existing framework of society for the sake of making experiments. Nay, more, she must not ignore the fact that self-regard is the necessary condition, and that her Master's law of moral conduct, that each shall love his neighbour as himself, implies a certain amount of self-regard. Com-