

ART. II.—THE CHURCH AND SOCIALISM.

SOCIALISM is a term the exact meaning of which there is considerable difficulty in defining; it has so many forms, and embraces so many different theories and projects. Perhaps Socialism may be roughly defined as "a principle of terminating the existing order of society, and of substituting another in which the distribution of wealth shall be less unequal." This seems to cover both the more moderate proposals and also those of a thoroughgoing Communism. A rhymist at the time of the Corn Law agitation attempted a definition in these lines:

What is a Communist? One who hath yearnings
 For equal division of unequal earnings;
 Idler or bungler, or both, he is willing
 To fork out his penny and pocket your shilling.

But this verse does little more than aim its satire at a weak point in the system.

What relation, it may well be asked, subsists between Socialism and the Church? Of *direct* relation surely there is none. The Church of Christ did not originate in Socialism, nor Socialism originate in the Church of Christ. The existence of either is not essentially connected with that of the other. But of *indirect* relation there is abundance. The Church professes to concern itself with the welfare of mankind and the increase of human happiness. Socialism professes to do the same. Here, then, is the meeting-place of the two systems where their mutual relations arise—relations obviously extending over a very wide surface, and which may be either relations of agreement or relations of opposition.

In considering the connection between the Church of Christ and Socialism it may be well to try and estimate the manner in which Christ Himself would have regarded it. He chose to enter the world as a member of a State which was not of a communistic order. Excepting in the case of the communities of Essenes, among whom it was a rule that all things should be held in common, it does not appear that He came into contact with socialistic practices; and of these Essenes, so far as we can tell from the New Testament record, He took not the smallest notice. But if our Lord had been brought into more direct and general contact with Communism than He was, we are perhaps justified in assuming that He would not explicitly have inveighed against it. It was not His custom to give direct instruction on subjects which lay outside the sphere of His immediate purpose. And that purpose in His incarnation was certainly not to give scientific instruction in political

economy, or indeed in any subject which men, using the endowments already bestowed on them by Heaven, were capable of mastering for themselves. In confirmation of this view, it may be noticed that our Lord was brought into contact with another manner of life equally connected with economics, and equally harmful to the welfare and progress of mankind. Surely slavery is hardly less inimical than Communism to human happiness and the true rights of man. Yet we look in vain among our Lord's recorded words for direct denunciations of slavery or slave-masters: He nowhere forbids His disciples either to hold or to be slaves. True, He enunciates principles which strike at the root of slavery and are found to make for its abolition; but He does not immediately attack it, any more than He attacks false theories of astronomy, barbarous practices in surgery or errors in other arts and sciences, which men had it in their power themselves to correct. In like manner, looking upon Communism as a mistaken method of political economy, we may conclude that Christ, even if brought into constant contact with it, would not have inveighed directly against it. Further, in support of this opinion it is interesting to recollect that on the one occasion when He was expressly requested to assist in a redistribution of wealth, and His judgment invoked in the matter, He distinctly refused to give it, or to entertain the question at all. "Man, who made Me a judge or divider over you?" (Luke xii. 14) are the words by which He declines to deal with the subject. To discharge the office of arbiter in such matters was not the purpose of His mission. He left the question open.

And so His disciples appear to have perceived; for although at the time of the Crucifixion we know that St. John, at any rate, had property of his own, we find within seven or eight weeks of that time a distinctly communistic system at work amongst them, apparently with the consent of all; and this system appears to have lasted amongst the Jerusalem Christians for a year or two, if not more, as we have a second mention of it later on. It has been pointed out, however, that this apostolic system of Communism was a voluntary and not a compulsory one, as is plain from St. Peter's statement to Ananias that his land was his own to do what he liked with it, to keep it or to throw it into the common stock. But although there was no decision of the apostolic college in this matter binding upon the Church, there must have been a very strong moral pressure upon its members to follow the general custom. The case of Ananias proves this fact as well as the other, for it is evident that both he and his wife were of such a character that they would certainly have preferred to retain not only a part, but the whole of their property, if they had not disliked to appear

less generous than their fellow-Churchmen. It has been surmised, with much probability, that the *cause* of this communistic practice of the first Christians was the necessity of providing for the poor Jewish converts who would be disinherited and left destitute by their natural supporters; and it has been surmised also, with equal likelihood, that the *result* of this adoption of communistic principles was the chronic state of poverty which seems to have existed among the Christians of Jerusalem. The system of having all things in common does not seem to have been adopted elsewhere, and even there it soon died out, probably not surviving the dispersion following upon St. Stephen's martyrdom and the closely succeeding persecution. As the Church had taken up the practice of one of the extreme forms of Socialism without any misgivings that she was disobeying the spirit of her Founder by such action, so, on the other hand, she laid it aside after trial, without any suspicion that that course also was not within her competence. She regarded it as a matter in which she was perfectly at liberty to modify her conduct according to the exigencies of the time and the dictates of experience.

But these dictates have been such that, from that early period down to the present latter day, the Church as a whole has never reverted—or, I think, even attempted to revert—to communistic practices. Voluntary societies and orders within her pale of one type or another have constantly renounced private property in the persons of their members, and held their goods in common. But the Catholic Church as a body has never tried to impose any such rule upon all her members. There is, however, a sentence in Tertullian's Apology (§ 39) which has sometimes been quoted in support of the notion that community of goods was practised by the Church in his day. The sentence, taken alone, certainly seems almost as strong an assertion as can be made: "Omnia indiscreta sunt apud nos, præter uxores." But Tertullian was in the habit of making not unfrequently trenchant assertions of a rough and ready kind, with a view of building upon them some telling retort against his adversaries. This is what he is doing here, as anyone may see who reads on to the end of the section. Little as anyone might suppose from the sentence itself, its real point, as he uses it, lies in its last words, "præter uxores"; for it is concerning conjugal relations that he goes on to speak, drawing, with much irony, a contrast between Christians and pagans in this matter distinctly unfavourable to the latter. Moreover, a strict interpretation of this sentence, as signifying entire community of goods, is quite inconsistent with what Tertullian says a few sentences before in this very same section of the Apology. Here he states that each Christian gave something monthly for the relief of

the distressed, but exactly when and how he might wish and might be able: "Nam nemo compellitur, sed sponte confert." This obviously would be impracticable in a really communistic body.

Many attempts have been made in various sects to enforce a rigorous Socialism upon their adherents. From the early Ebionites down to the most modern Shaker communities in the United States, such practices have constantly cropped up among those outside the Church's fold. But thorough-going Socialism of this kind has generally had a very short life, ending in calamitous failure; or where its existence has been prolonged, it has been either by the virtual abandonment of some of its severest rules as intolerably onerous and unfair, or by its restriction to a very peculiar and limited community. It is, however, to the socialistic excesses of one of these sects that we are indebted for any official pronouncement of the English Church upon the subject. Communism was advocated amongst the Anabaptists of the Reformation period, and had its most disastrous development at Munster, in Westphalia, in 1534. Consequently, our Thirty-eighth Article asserts that "the riches and goods of Christians are not common, as touching the right, title, and possession of the same, as certain Anabaptists do falsely boast." And it proceeds to recommend liberal almsgiving, doubtless as the divinely-prescribed corrective to the danger which ever attends those rights of property which the first half of it upholds. Unfortunately, a certain ambiguity attaches to the leading clause of the Article alike in its English and its Latin form. "The riches and goods of Christians are not common." This may be taken to mean either that Communism is not *permissible*, or merely that it is not *commanded*, to Christians. The alteration of the Latin title at the last revision from the old "Christianorum bona non sunt communia" to the new and somewhat stronger form, "De illicitâ bonorum communicatione," might seem to make for the former interpretation; but when we reflect that the communistic practice of the first Christians could not have been overlooked by the promulgators of the Article, I think the latter interpretation is the one which may be most reasonably maintained; for it was not against their practices that the assertions of the Article were aimed, but against those of certain Protestant sectaries who contended, not that community of goods was permissible, but that it was compulsory. So far, then, has the English Church spoken on the subject, affirming, in contradiction of those who held the opposite, that community of goods is not a part of the Christian religion.

It is difficult to find, until quite recently, any authorized pronouncement on socialistic theories. References to the subject

may exist, but if so, I have not been able to trace them either in the canons or the homilies. It is, indeed, not unfrequently contended that every direction of the Church to the giving of alms, every injunction in the Bible to the same effect, is of itself an absolute condemnation of the principles of Communism. At the first glance it may look as if it was so; because where community of goods is complete, almsgiving becomes an impossibility. But the object of almsgiving, on the side of the giver, surely is to remind him that his property is a trust; and on the side of the receiver, to relieve his necessity and evoke his gratitude. In a state of ideal communism, however, there is no private property out of which alms can be given, nor are there any indigent on whom they can be bestowed. Now, neither God nor His Church expect obedience to their commands from those who are so circumstanced as to render obedience impossible. It would be as unreasonable to accuse a Christian in a communistic state of sin for neglecting the duty of almsgiving, as to accuse a man of disobedience to the Fifth Commandment who had 'no parents, or of failing to comply with the order, "Honour the king," if he lived in a republic. It seems probable that the argument against extreme Socialism, based upon the frequent injunctions to almsgiving, has been unduly strained to an extent which it will not bear. Others will no doubt entertain a different opinion; but to the present writer it appears that even Communism, the extreme form of Socialism, however erroneous it may be as a principle of economics, is for all that not radically irreconcilable with Christ's Church. They are not of necessity mutually exclusive systems. And if the extreme form of Socialism is not radically irreconcilable with Christianity, its partial and more moderate forms are, of course, still less so. Nevertheless, though Communism may co-exist with Christianity, it can hardly be deemed favourable to its best development; because, like all mistaken principles of action, it is more or less injurious to the interests of mankind. It is so in many ways. It hinders, *e.g.*, not the use, but the most advantageous use, of God's gifts; it tends to a reckless management of such personal affairs as are left within the power of each; it relaxes family bonds; it is antagonistic to industry; it is unfavourable to the duties of perseverance and self-support; it diminishes the sense of responsibility; and in its stricter forms it seriously curtails the liberty of the individual. And thus, in all these and many other respects, it reacts—indirectly indeed, but very unfavourably—upon the development of the Church, especially as it is influenced by the characters, creditable or discreditable, of its separate members. Although obedience to communistic laws may be

perfectly *permissible* to Christians, it presupposes a state of society which is eminently undesirable, and, while not being of necessity hostile, is at all events more of a hindrance than a help to the full life and progress of the Church.

On such matters as the State regulation of labour, wages, price of food, and hours of work, no expression of opinion is here given; for their connection with the Church is remote, and a specialist in political economy is required for the satisfactory treatment of such questions. Many of my readers will remember how the Bishop of Rochester (now of Winchester) in his recent Charge, recommended the clergy, unless particularly qualified, not to interfere directly in the discussion of these topics; because that, as a body, their previous education and training had not fitted them to give valuable opinions on matters for the due treatment of which an accurate and prolonged study of economics is indispensable. One of the London Radical newspapers (by no means so unfair to the Church as many of them) immediately had an article on the subject, in which it remarked that if the bishop's estimate of the clerical knowledge of political economy was correct, it only afforded another proof of the unfitness of the clergy at the present day for the public positions which they held. The writer of this comment overlooked the fact that it is only of recent years that questions of Socialism have been at all of a prominent or practical character in England; nor till quite lately has the subject had any interest to the great mass of our parishioners. He overlooked also the fact that at the Lambeth Conference of 1888 one of the recommendations of the Committee on Socialism was that in future the Church should "require some knowledge of economic science from her candidates for orders."

To this great Conference we are indebted for the latest official, or rather semi-official, utterance of the Anglican Church throughout the world on the subject of Socialism. And the Bishop of Ely, in appointing "Church and Socialism" as a subject for discussion in the deaneries, specially recommends his clergy to study it. The "Report of the Committee appointed to consider the subject of the Church's practical work in relation to Socialism" was received by the Conference, and is of much value. There is also in the Encyclical Letter a paragraph, of which these are the concluding sentences: "To study schemes proposed for redressing the social balance; to welcome the good which may be found in the aims and operations of any; and to devise methods, whether by legislation or by social combinations, or in any other way, for a peaceful solution of the problems, without violence or injustice, is one of the noblest pursuits which can engage the thoughts of those who strive to follow in the footsteps of Christ. Suggest-

tions are offered in the Report which may assist in solving this problem." That Report was drawn up by an episcopal committee, whose chairman was the Bishop of Manchester, known to take, like his predecessor, a keen interest in social subjects. It is an admirably drawn-up document of some seven pages, containing a very clear statement of the matured opinions of those who have thought upon this subject from an ecclesiastical point of view. The Report begins with a discussion of some of the definitions of Socialism, and then it makes a statement as to the relations between the Church and Socialism, with which the opinions expressed earlier in this paper are not at variance. It is this: "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 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." The Report makes several practical proposals as to the Church's duty in the matter at the present time, and answers certain objections which may be made to those proposals.

As far as individual (in contradistinction to State) action goes, almsgiving and self-sacrifice are recommended on the part of the rich, thrift and self-help on the part of the poor. These virtues have no doubt been practised to some extent, but it is to be feared only by the minority. And a warning is given of a Nemesis arising to punish the neglect of them, which may involve in one common social catastrophe both majority and minority alike. The principles of even an extreme Socialism may not be irreconcilable with those of the Christian Church; but the methods which are talked of for bringing those principles into action undoubtedly are. An unjust confiscation of private property, enforced, if necessary, by violence and bloodshed, is, of course, entirely so. But the half-starved proletarian is little likely to be checked in his schemes by a consideration of this kind when his cupidity is excited by demagogues themselves generally well fed and paid. Indeed, the thoroughgoing Socialist is generally ignorant of the true principles of the Church of Christ, and of the relation in which it stands to himself and his aspirations. And to whom is this ignorance due? Chiefly, it is to be feared, to the apathy, selfishness, and insensibility to the duties of Christian brotherhood on the part of those moneyed classes whose property the Communist now covets. They have not taken care that the Church of Christ should have ample means in men and money to present herself adequately before him in the fulness of her loving power to satisfy, with the gifts and graces she holds in

trust, all the desires of man. We can, no doubt, point to a multitude of noble examples to the contrary among the wealthy: but, if one set about it, how very much larger a multitude might be discerned, many of whom do very little, and still more do nothing appreciable, for the real good of those below them! If one could obtain an income-tax return from one of our so-called fashionable parishes either in London or elsewhere, and also a return of the full amount expended by the same taxpayers in pious and charitable works, the latter amount, taken absolutely, might seem large; but, taken relatively to the other, it will probably always be found woefully disproportionate and small. The faults are, of course, not all on one side. Those on the other must not be blinked, notably ingratitude to those rich who do try to help the poor, and a narrow-mindedness and want of foresight which often baffles the most carefully-planned schemes for their benefit. But are not even these and other faults of the poor greatly discounted by a marvellously patient endurance of lots which are often very hard, and in some cases seem to us to be almost insupportably so?

This paper may conclude in the cautious but wise words with which the Report terminates: "There is less temptation to over-haste in forcing on social experiments, inasmuch as the history of the past shows convincingly that the principles of the Gospel contain germs from which social renovation is surely, if slowly, developed by the continuous action of Christian thought and feeling upon every form of evil and suffering. If all will only labour, under the impulse of Christian love, for the highest benefit of each, we shall advance by the shortest possible path to that better and happier future for which our Master taught us to hope and pray."

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ART. III.—SOME CURIOSITIES OF PATRISTIC AND MEDIÆVAL LITERATURE.

No. I.

NOT long since the question was asked, we believe, in one of the weekly journals: "Did authors correct their printers' proofs in the sixteenth century?" We can see no reason whatever to doubt that they did. That they did so in the early part of the seventeenth century can hardly be doubted. If we had no other evidence of this, it might suffice to appeal to the prefatory matter which stands before an edition of the