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Scottish Land and Labour League

S O C I A L I S M

ON ITS

D E F E N C E :

A REPLY TO PROFESSOR FLINT.

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“JUSTICE IS THE FREEDOM OF THOSE WHO ARE EQUAL :
INJUSTICE IS THE FREEDOM OF THOSE WHO ARE UNEQUAL.”

—*Jacobi.*

SOCIALISM ON ITS DEFENCE:

A REPLY TO PROFESSOR FLINT.



THE community is indebted to Professor Flint for calling its attention to Socialism, and for this service Socialists must be specially grateful. We have confidence in our position. The more our system is considered, the wider will be its acceptance. The prelates were recommended by a sagacious observer during the Réformation to burn the martyrs in cellars, and the newspapers, in the exercise of a similar discretion, generally exclude the utterances of Socialists from their columns. We must, however, thank Professor Flint not only for lecturing on the subject, but for the kind things he has said with respect to us—a fact we are apt to forget in the midst of his misrepresentations. Socialism has hitherto been received with ridicule and reviling by many ignorant but important people among us, who will now, after the assurance of an eminent theologian, believe there is something in it. Dr Flint has at least confessed the importance of the subject, and has therefore led many to its consideration. It does seem singular, however, that it should have been left to the faculty of Divinity to undertake this work, but the persistent indifference of the lecturer on Economics is more than a sufficient excuse for entering on his province. He seems engrossed with the depreciation of silver,

and only recognises the existence of Socialists to denounce them, on the authority of imperfect statistics, for repeating the conclusion of Fawcett and other orthodox economists, that in relation to the increase of wealth the rich are growing richer, and the poor, poorer. The statement may be true or false, it matters little to Socialists, and has no special bearing on their system. To the credit of Dr Flint, economics is rather more to him than a question of the currency. He does not seem to believe the condition of the people is much affected by the comparative value of metals ; and in this respect the disciple of the Master certainly shows to better advantage than the nominee of the merchants.

Even this, however, does not exhaust our reasons for gratitude to the Professor. Socialism is a vague word under which some shelter themselves with whose opinions and methods few of us can sympathise. The system, like every other, has its dangers, and it is well to face them : it has also its false and foolish friends, and it is well to know them. A good critic would at present be a true benefactor to us, but, unfortunately, it is only in a very modified sense we can apply this term to Dr Flint. We frankly admit a real value in his lectures, but they are vitiated at the outset from want of a proper definition, and rendered ineffective throughout from want of sufficient discrimination. It may seem daring to question the information of the learned Professor, considering the reputation he deservedly enjoys in all circles, but our imputation of ignorance is sufficiently justified in his treatment of Socialism. With the origin and history of the movement, up to within fifty years ago, he shews a certain familiarity, but this sketch of it stands in striking contrast to his superficial acquaintance with its

modern revival. It would, however, be as reasonable for one ignorant of the physiology of the last half-century to undertake its instruction to the students of to-day, as it is for one to speak of the Socialism of the present from a study of its literature in the past. Mere reading indeed gives one little insight in either case. Words half conceal as well as half reveal the thoughts of men, and it is only after mixing much with them you can be very confident about their ideas. We not only suffer from misrepresentation, but, the fact is, we hardly ever experience anything else. Much of this is no doubt the result of ignorance more or less culpable, but some of it is produced on purpose to discredit us. Our sayings are perverted and our doings defamed. It is difficult, therefore, for an outsider like Dr Flint to know much about us with accuracy, but even he would have known more if he had come to his subject with the sympathy of the critic instead of the partiality of the polemic. There has in fact been rather much logic in his treatment of Socialism, and this concession is not meant by way of compliment; for conclusions drawn rigorously from defective premises are bound to be erroneous. We venture to affirm, there is not a Socialist of any intelligence prepared to accept the definition of it given by Dr. Flint, or willing to admit any validity in the objections urged by him against it. He may, of course, affect to despise the one, but he cannot be indifferent to the other. No controversy can be conducted to any satisfactory issue, unless the combatants agree about the point in dispute. Argument otherwise is a mere beating of the air. The Socialism of these lectures however, is, in the opinion of Socialists, partly an anachronism and partly a figment; while the reasons of his opposition to it resolve themselves into its interference with the

liberty of the individual, and of its realisation by violence. Now, we do not altogether deny the applicability of this criticism to certain forms of Socialism and its supporters, but a definition must not confound a part with the whole. It would really be much fairer to say that all Christians believed in the Mass than to bring such objections against Socialism ; for they not only do not belong to the essence of the system, but, even as accidents, apply to a very limited number of its advocates. As a matter of fact, there are many Socialists averse to war in every shape and form, nor could Dr. Flint find one disposed to prefer war to peace in the realisation of his ideas. The worst one can say about the most of them is, that they will not turn their cheek to the smiter. Force will be met by force. The Socialists of Germany for example were constitutional reformers till Bismarck passed repressive measures against them ; and Britain has nothing to fear from violence on our part so long as her military and police do not interfere with our rights of public meeting and political action. It is scarcely candid, moreover, to represent even the militant attitude of Socialism as peculiar. History unfortunately shows the sword has been a frequent and efficient instrument of enfranchisement. There were circumstances when even Christ seemed to think it would be the duty of His disciples to part with their garments and buy one, and certainly much has been yielded to violence that never was given to entreaty. It was the battle-axe of the barons that compelled a craven king to sign Magna Charta. The Commons of England could only get its Petition of Rights by the Ironsides of Cromwell. There were riots enough before even the middle classes secured the Reform Bill of '32. Nor are the powerful any wiser to-day. Ireland has triumphed by dynamite as well

as organisation, and the action of our politicians must be held largely responsible for the spread among the people of the deplorable conviction that petitions are mere paper unless presented on pikes. The language of the most sanguine Socialist indicates nothing worse than the belief that history will in this respect repeat itself in connection with his movement. Let us hope he may be mistaken, and there is no reason in fact for the fulfilment of his prophecy. The Government has only to treat Socialists with justice to avert this calamity. Their scheme could be realised to-morrow with felicitation instead of fighting, if our merchants and manufacturers would simply resolve to use their influence and power for the welfare of all instead of for their own. The capital and intelligence so much wasted at present in internecine competition would then be concentrated for the benefit of the community, instead of employed for the glorification of individuals. Let them continue, on the contrary, to exploit the workers for their own profit, as well as oppose the machinery of law to the demands of justice, and violence will characterise the triumph of Socialism, as it has done that of every great and good movement. May God, however, avert the omen! We shrink from the contemplation of such a conflict, but must protest with all possible vehemence against Dr Flint throwing on Socialism the responsibility of such a result. If he is in earnest about the maintenance of peace, let him preach to the originators of war, and this, if all stories are true, will mean plain speaking directed to high quarters. May we shed our blood for the restoration of a Battenberg and not spare a drop for the emancipation of our brethren? The curse of Capitalism, however, is even worse than the influence of Courts. It sent out our soldiers to Egypt to

slaughter the poor peasants for not paying exorbitant taxes to meet the claims of avaricious bondholders. They gave their money freely to minister to the sensuality of a vicious Viceroy on condition of receiving a high rate of interest wrung from the extreme poverty of his industrious subjects, and would, for the same inducement, supply the sinews of war to the greatest enemy of their own country. So much for the morality of Capitalism, which at this very moment is anxious to get up a Continental war for the sake of immediate gain. It must all, however, be done under the name of patriotism. Patriotism! It would burn the palladia of the country to cook its potatoes. It would be worthier, therefore, of Dr Flint to attack, in our exchanges and cabinets, the promoters of war, than to make sport for the Philistines by throwing ridicule on the lovers of peace. Even Goethe, with all his heathenism, saw in the conduct of the rulers the real cause for all popular risings, and a nation like Scotland, honouring the Covenanters for resisting with their blood the imposition of a liturgy, is not likely to censure their descendants in contending for a living.

In connection, however, with violence, we may be pardoned a passing reference to the revolutionary character of Socialism. Dr Flint said very truly it was not "A system merely of amendment, improvement, and reform." It holds the condition of society to be "essentially one of anarchy and injustice," and for this reason it is impossible to tinker at it, as if it were essentially sound. Industry must be carried on for the good of all instead of the gain of one, and nothing short of the realisation of this ideal will content Socialists. We are certainly revolutionary in this sense but in no other. Such a term neither of necessity implies

the use of violence nor indifference to circumstances. We know full well theories cannot be carried out unless in harmony with the nature and surroundings of men. We are in no danger, therefore, of degenerating into *doctrinaires*. Our revolution is based on evolution, and is no more “momentous and unparalleled” than other changes through which industry has already passed. The movement from competition to co-operation is really in no way greater than that from communal to private property in land, and will be accomplished from the same motive, and perhaps by the same method. Socialism can only be realised by people believing it to be for their interest. We are not likely to imitate the conduct of the Emperor of Russia in constructing a railway between Moscow and St Petersburg. He merely asked for a map and drew a strait line from the one town to the other, utterly regardless of the condition of the country lying between. It is not after this fashion we desire or expect the institution of Socialism. There are signs of decrepitude about the system of Competition. Grey hairs are upon it. The crust is cracking, and multitudes are going down to the abyss. Society is groaning under its insecurity. Infinite mischief is produced by its periodical crises and its limited companies. Capital is being concentrated. Manufacturers and merchants are collapsing around us, and falling into the ranks of the workers, while the workers are, by the extension of machinery, being driven to the streets. The drones are drawing dividends and the industrious are eating dust. This inequality, however, has stimulated the sentiment of justice. The better nature of rich and poor is rising in rebellion against our oppressive circumstances. Righteousness can alone exalt a people, and the effect of iniquity in the land is to

induce many to cast their idols of silver and gold to the moles and to the bats, in order to lift the beggar from the dunghill and set the poor among princes. The forces of our revolution are thus busily at work, and cannot be stopped by a mere arrangement of words. It is for us to secure control over them and guide them to a speedy and salutary issue. Destruction need not be known within our borders. The stones of our temple are being fashioned in the quarry, and if only the wealthy and powerful would see it to be their interest, as it undoubtedly is, rather to further than to frustrate our efforts, the stately edifice would forthwith be erected amid the jubilation of a harmonious people. Industry has but to follow the advice given by the lecturer, and organise itself to secure this consummation so devoutly to be wished. It would then become conscious of its power, to the dismay of the idlers; and, gathering round it the wisdom and integrity of the community, its victory would neither be doubtful nor difficult. But, whatever may betide, the Socialists will be true to themselves.

“ We are they who will not falter,
Many swords or few,
Till we make this earth the altar
Of a worship new.
We are they who will not take
From palace, priest, or code,
A meaner law than ‘Brotherhood,’
A lower lord than ‘God.’ ”

We come at last to consider the definition given by Dr Flint. He played, with his usual logical ability, between the terms Individualism and Socialism, and reached, as every sensible person might have expected, the somewhat barren conclusion that the one was the opposite of the other. He was, of course, wise enough to see that if the one pole meant slavery the other stood at savagery, and

therefore, he argued, we must have a judicious mixture of both. The commonplace philosopher always comes to the same conclusion. There is a good deal to be said on both sides. No doubt, but there must be some order in dealing with them if we are to arrive at any satisfactory result. The social toddy will never be perfect without this treatment of the separate ingredients. Dr Flint set himself to pour out the whisky of Individualism and the hot water of Socialism, as well as to add a little sentiment by way of sugar, but he got scalded in the operation, and dropped the kettle. It is impossible on any other supposition to account for the energetic but irrelevant remarks that escaped him at this time. He insisted upon paying no attention to the method of mixing the several ingredients together, forgetting that hot water is the basis of all good toddy. Enterprise can only be mischievous unless inspired by justice, and this is really the essence of Socialism. Nothing could well be more erroneous than the idea of the two poles suggested by the lecturer. The Socialism of to-day, unlike that of yesterday, is in no way opposed to liberty. It really differs in this respect little from politics; for just as in politics you have one party inclined to favour and another to oppose the action of Government, so is it with Socialism. There is, however, a difference between the two, and it is one telling still more strongly against the statements of Dr Flint. There is no system so anxious as Socialism to secure the liberty of the individual. One of the planks of the Governmental or Marxist party is the extension of freedom to every member of the community, while the devotion of the Anarchists to the same idea puts even Herbert Spencer to shame. These, however, are all Socialists. They are all agreed in their love of liberty, as well as in their opposition

to the tyranny of majorities, and differ only about the steps necessary to its realisation. Not only so, they are at one in thinking the present system of competition is altogether inconsistent with any sufficient measure of freedom to the great mass of the people. Hunger enslaves one to purpose, and so long as we are dependent on the few for the means of livelihood, so long will they remain our masters. Socialism sets itself to the solution of this problem. It proclaims liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound. Instead of having any desire to interfere with our freedom, it is inspired throughout by a purpose to extend it. The principle, therefore, repudiated by all Socialists is really, by a strange perversity, the one constituting the definition of Dr Flint, while that on which they are all agreed is the one he systematically ignores.

Socialism is simply neither more nor less than an attempt to transfer the means of production and distribution from the possession of the individual to the control of the community, in order that every one willing to work may get it, and be paid the full value of his labour. In proof of this let me quote from an article in the *Nineteenth Century* for February, by our comrade, P. Kropotkin, on "The Scientific Basis of Anarchy." "In common with all Socialists," he says, "the Anarchists hold that the private ownership of land, capital, and machinery has had its time." The watchword of Socialism is, "Economical freedom as the only secure basis for spiritual freedom." In spite of such explicit definition, however, we find Dr Flint assuring his admiring audience of exploiters and exploited that the central idea of Socialism is, that labour is the source of all wealth, and that labour is often confounded by us with the mere use of our hands. There are no doubt ignorant

people among us, and one would not like to become responsible for all their statements, but would the learned Professor not object if we went for an exposition of his creed to a street preacher? Intelligence, we maintain, on the contrary, is essential for every operation, except the drawing of dividends, and ought to be rewarded if applied to public welfare. This is the doctrine of Socialism. It is really too absurd to blame us at one time for indifference to land and capital in the creation of wealth, and at another to denounce us for desiring to get possession of them by legal means if possible, but by all means since necessary. We know the value of these things in the production of wealth, and maintain not only the right of all to what has been created by none, but that every modification of natural agents for human welfare has been brought about by combined labour, and ought not therefore to be in the possession of individuals, but under the control of the community. Capital, for example, is wanted very badly at present to provide the poor with nourishing food, warm clothing, and decent houses, but cannot be had for such purposes, since its owners find it more remunerative "to supply the Khedive with harems, and the Russian Government with strategic railways and Krupp guns." It would seem, however, we ought to acquiesce in such an arrangement, and refuse to say to any member of society, "I have no need of thee." It is impossible for us to do so, and we presume Dr Flint himself is not prepared to fully carry out this principle. It is really a platitude, meaning anything or nothing, and therefore worthy of the ignorant applause with which it was greeted. Are we willing, for example, to apply it to the criminals in our midst? Do we actually require thieves? Certainly not. But if not, why not?

The answer is of course obvious. They are taking what belongs to others, and either living in idleness themselves or devoting their energy to the production of mischief. Just so! We can do very well without them, and they constitute a very large category. Mr. Ruskin somewhere divides society into robbers, beggars, and workers. It seems to us the last class should set itself to get rid of the other two, for in so doing it would not only perform a duty to itself, but confer a benefit on them. Nor should this be a difficult task to accomplish, for the workers really number two-thirds of the community, and are sufficiently generous to keep only one-third of the national income to themselves.

The lynx eye of the lecturer, however, sees the cloven hoof in such statements. He would turn in holy horror from our figures and suggestions. We are, according to him, indifferent to the intellectual, moral, and religious mission of society. Such objections do certainly surprise us. Are we not doing, with our miserable resources, much to persuade the community to consider its own interest? Can Dr Flint really believe people have much intelligence who submit to such a chaotic and iniquitous state of matters, or would he find a greater proof of it in their familiarity with metaphysical problems? Moral! Do we know any morality that can dispense with justice in our relation to each other? It is at least the aim of Socialism to extend this principle, and we utterly fail to understand how any society can be conscious of a moral mission that does not set herself to deliver the oppressed from the spoiler. Has not the inequality of the classes much to do with the immorality of both? We must have neither the luxury of the rich nor the privation of the poor, if we desire virtue to prevail in

the community. Wise man was he who sought neither poverty nor riches, for the one brings temptations to extravagance and the other to avarice. Religious! May we presume to differ on this point from a doctor of the Church? We will not venture to discuss with him questions of dogma, ceremony, or institution. These, we submit, are not of the essence of religion. We read somewhere in an old book for which, along with himself, many of us profess the greatest respect, that what God really requires of one is to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before Him. This is the principle of Socialism. We are bold enough, in fact, to number in our ranks the Son of Man Himself, and certainly His immediate followers went very much farther than our present proposals. The religion of Christ did not consist of sermons and sacrifices, nor did it ever become indifferent to our temporal condition. One was not only taught by Him to love his neighbour as himself, but commanded to leave his gift at the altar till he had been reconciled to his brother. There are religions, of course, indifferent to all moral and social considerations, but we generally speak of them as superstitions, and contrast them, to their disadvantage, with Christianity. The elementary principles of it demand that we stand in a right relation to each other. It is, however, the desire of Socialism to promote this, and therefore the statement of Dr Flint that "At present the main body of the Socialist army" looks on "religion with a jealous and hostile eye," may be met with a direct negative. He is too good a logician and theologian not to know the ambiguous use he is here making of the term "religion." What is religion? Is it to be identified with Popery or Presbyterianism? Must it be connected with temples and tithes? Many Socialists of

course, like other sensible people, have grave doubts about the value of much connected with our ecclesiastical religions. They are not enamoured of priestcraft and dogma. This suspicion, however, of what has proved so mischievous, makes them prize all the more the evangelical religion of justice and mercy opposed to it. Dr. Flint had also a sneer at the "so-called Christian Socialists," for looking on Christ as "a mere Social Reformer," but, so far as any relevancy in it was concerned, he might as well, like a popular orator, have applied it to "this so-called nineteenth century." Our Christianity is a reality, and this is more than, with all our charity, we can confess to be the case with much of the religion sheltering itself under the ægis of the Professor. There was more of cavil than candour in contrasting to their disadvantage the Christian Socialists of the present with Maurice and Kingsley. It is impossible to admire either the spirit or the accuracy of such remarks, for there is really no essential difference between the Christian Socialism of to-day and that of a generation ago. Maurice was intensely opposed to the principle of competition—to buying in the cheapest and selling in the dearest market—to every one for himself and none for his neighbour. It was to him an inspiration of Antichrist—utterly inconsistent with the command to "look not every one on his own things, but every one also on the things of others." Competition appeared to Maurice diametrically opposed to Christian precept as well as example, and had therefore to be completely rejected. Attempts to correct the evil results of it are simply efforts to make Satan respectable, and are therefore doomed to failure. We certainly agree in this view of competition, and desire with him to substitute for it the principle of co-operation. This, however, is the aim of

Socialism. It is true he was not in favour of confiscation or violence in carrying it out, but no more are the Christian Socialists of to-day. They cannot, however, altogether determine the course humanity will take, or be allowed to take, in the realisation of its ideals, but in doing what they can to persuade the rich to consider the condition of the poor and act justly towards them, they deserve not only to be complimented for their noble purpose, but also for their excellent method. Nor is it by any means the case that Christ is reduced by them to "a mere Social Reformer." There is not only liberty to hold every variety of opinion about His person and work, but the variety exists. Trinitarian and Unitarian meet on the same platform of evangelical morality, and believe it is better to carry out the gospel precepts on which they all agree, than dispute about the theological dogmas on which they differ.

Controversy with Dr. Flint is not a pleasure to us, but Caesar must yield to Rome. We expected larger knowledge and wiser counsels from him. The community ought to know the meaning of Socialism, and these lectures, with all their merits, will only make "confusion worse confounded." They have certainly done harm to the lecturer. Many familiar with the subject, and not without respect for himself, have been asking in perplexity an explanation of his statements, reluctant to account for them either through ignorance or intention. It is not for us to deal with the causes, but with the errors themselves. We can, however, easily account for them without the imputation of any unworthy motives to the lecturer, for Dr. Flint is, unfortunately, not the only wise and good man in the community capable of saying foolish things about Socialism, and we do not despair of his conversion. There were times, indeed,

when even he seemed to kick against the pricks of his conscience in his condemnation of our system, and we can only hope that by the exercise of his trained intellect, as well as under the inspiration of his better nature, he will be speedily led to embrace it. None would receive a warmer welcome into our ranks, and few could do more for our cause. It is in this spirit of conciliation we desire to criticise his statements. He has far too much good sense ever to be influenced by the applause of an ignorant multitude, most of them in broad-cloth and seal-skin, while we can wish him no greater honour than to become a leader in our beneficent movement, for its aim is not merely the elevation of man to the stature of Christ, but the realisation of the Kingdom of God upon earth.

“ Then let us pray that come it may,
As come it will for a' that,
That sense an' worth o'er a' the earth
May bear the gree an' a' that.
For a' that, an' a' that,
It's comin' yet for a' that,
That man to man the world o'er
Shall brithers be an' a' that.”

“ BE JUST AND FEAR NOT.”



