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NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY

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SOCIALISM.

TO THE EDITOR ———.

SIR,

The efforts of the members of the "Trinity Church Mutual Improvement Association" to increase their store of useful knowledge deserve nothing but praise. But, judging from the report you give of a lecture on "Socialism" by the Reverend President, I fear the members will be liable to mistakes of a serious kind if they confine their search for truth within such a limited area as that apparently covered by this exposition. That Christ was a great Socialistic teacher is beyond dispute, and that he taught and practised "self-sacrifice" is not by any means a full statement of the facts. He taught rich men to "sell all that they possessed", and his earliest followers, we are told, did so, and had "all things in common". Are we to understand that the lecturer is prepared to direct his flock to follow this example, in both the spirit and the letter? If not, what becomes of the assertion that the Christ-like form of Socialism is the "only one" which will "ever be possible"?

I do not understand the phrase "Compulsory Socialism", nor to what system it can be applied. Hence I am unable to judge of its asserted "absolute impossibility". The lecturer appears to have implied that this system of "compulsory Socialism" was "experimented upon in France", and "caused the streets of Paris to be drenched in blood". It is not explained which event was referred to—the early French Revolution, that of 1830, or the more modern Commune? In either case, the reference was entirely misleading, and Socialism, either "compulsory" or "arbitrary", was in no sense whatever the "cause" of the events mentioned. This muddling-up of Socialism, Atheism, and other disliked "isms" is a very common practice, especially in addressing an audience believed to be not too well read in history. But at the present day such inaccuracies and loose statements are risky and liable to be detected, even in least expected quarters. Hardly less obscure and misleading were the lecturer's definitions of "Individualism" and "Christian Socialism". The Rev. Stewart Headlam would have demolished the lecturer's position in a few minutes, and, unless the reporter failed to catch the drift of the statements made, the result of the prescribed line of action would certainly be "confusion worse confounded".

If Socialism is to be described at all, it should be fairly and candidly done, because the exhibition of a mere caricature of so important a movement will certainly not "mutually improve" any persons who listen thereto. Systems of Socialism have been and are many and various, and a proper historical description of them must be both interesting and instructive. Such a retrospect would reach back to Crete and Sparta, the ancient German com-

munities (from one of which the Anglo-Saxons came), the Essenes of Judea, the Anabaptists, and many other forms of Socialistic association. Of later years the labours of worthy old Robert Owen, Fourierism, the theories of Paine, Spence, Godwin, and others would require notice. Later on still the work and writings of Karl Marx and his school, with the views of Mill, Spencer, Bax, the leading spirits of the Social Democratic Federation, the leaders of the Co-operative movement, the Fabian Society, and a host of modern writers and speakers—all these would have to be carefully considered before moderate justice could be done to the subject of Socialism. Certainly this vast subject is not one to be disposed of by a vague, hackneyed, and utterly misleading reference to the French Revolution—an event no more the result of any form of Socialism than it was the consequence of the discovery of the Copernican system or of the mariner's compass.

Let me explain that I am not a Socialist, any more than the reverend lecturer is one, except in the sense that now-a-days we are all more or less acting under the influence of Socialistic principles, whether we know it or not. This great subject is one which is daily engaging the deep attention of many of the wisest and best men and women of the age, in this and other countries. The absorbing problems of land and labour, and capital and labour, are being thought out and solutions sought; and into the possession of the ripe fruit of all this study and investigation humanity will one day enter. I may, or I may not, agree with Mr. Morris, Mr. Hyndman, or Mrs. Besant, in the conclusions at which they arrive; but that they and a thousand others are doing useful work I am bound to admit. Such a movement is not to be thrust

aside by a Podsnapian wave of the hand, nor settled and disposed of in a half-hour lecture.

The old *laissez faire* system has been tried and found grievously wanting, and the doctrine of "every man for himself" has failed to satisfy the needs of the age. This movement towards Socialism is not the work of "Agitators", and therein lies the silly old mistake into which so many well-meaning people have fallen. Agitators are effects, not causes; they are the products of the spirit that moves in millions of human breasts, a spirit that cannot be sneered down, nor even chained down, by any human power. Agitators are only the outward and visible signs of the inward and spiritual aspirations of the people.

We may few of us live to see it, but I recognise even in this much misunderstood, and so often fatuously misrepresented Socialism, one of those hopeful and noble onward and upward tendencies of humanity, that are working day by day towards that golden age sung of by the poets, and which, as Southey says,

" Shall bless the race, redeemed of man, when wealth
And power, and all their hideous progeny,
Shall sink, annihilate, and all mankind
Live in the equal brotherhood of love ! "

Yours, etc.,

January 20th, 1890.

RAD.

[NOTE.—The editor of the newspaper in which the report referred to appeared, declined to insert the above letter.]