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George R. Sims**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A CRITIQUE OF SOCIALISM ***

A CRITIQUE OF SOCIALISM

By George R. Sims

Read Before The Ruskin Club Of Oakland California,

Edward F. Adams, Paul Elder and Company Publishers, San Francisco

1905

**WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE AUTHOR TO
THE RUSKIN CLUB OF OAKLAND**

WHOSE MEMBERS LISTENED SO PATIENTLY TO THE READING OF THIS PAPER AND DANCED ON IT SO BLITHELY THEREAFTER, AS AN INTIMATION OF HIS FERVENT BELIEF THAT NO MORE CHARMING CONVOCATION OF SOCIALISTS, OR ONE MORE HOPELESSLY ENTHRALLED BY THEIR DELUSIONS, EXISTS ON EARTH.

TO THE RUSKIN CLUB:—

When your Mr. Bamford wrote me that the Ruskin Club was out hunting trouble, and that if I would come over here the bad men of the club would "do me up," I confess my first impulse was to excuse myself from the proffered hospitality. In the first place, as I have never posed as a social champion I had no reputation at stake and I was horribly afraid. Secondly, while my reading of Socialist and Anti-Socialist literature is the reverse of extensive, I am very sure that nothing can be said for or against Socialism which has not already been said many times, and so well said that a fair collection of Anti-Socialist literature would make a punching-bag solid enough to absorb the force of the most energetic of pugilists. Finally, the inutility of such a sally presented itself forcibly, since there is, so far as I know, no record of the reformation of a Socialist

after the habit is once firmly established. But while at first these considerations were all against my putting on my armor, in the end the instinct of eating and fighting, which is as forceful in the modern savage, under the veneer of civilization, as in our unpolished progenitors, overcame all considerations of prudence, and here I am to do battle according to my ability. I promise to strike no foul blows and not to dodge the most portentous of whacks, but to ride straight at you and hit as hard as I can.

CRITIQUE OF SOCIALISM

WHILE it is doubtless true that no one can live in the world without in some degree modifying his environment, it is also true that the influence of a single person is seldom appreciable or his opinion upon social questions of sufficient importance to excite curiosity, but I confess that when I listen to an address intended to be thoughtful, I enjoy it more or at any rate endure it better, if I have some knowledge of the mental attitude of the speaker toward his general subject. Thinking that possibly those who hear me this evening may have the same feeling, I begin by saying that I earnestly favor a just distribution of comfort. I suppose that if I should analyze the mental processes leading to that wish, I should find toward the bottom a conviction that if each had his due I should be better off. The objection to the Socialistic program is that it would prevent a just distribution of comfort.

Some years ago in a book of which I was guilty, I wrote the following: "There is implied in all Socialistic writing the doctrine that organized man can override, and as applied to himself, repeal the fundamental law of Nature, that no species can endure except by the production of more individuals than can be supported, of whom the weakest must die, with the corollary of misery before death. Competitive Society tends to the death of the weakest, Socialistic Society would tend to the preservation of the weak. There can be no question of the grandeur of this conception. To no man is given nobler aspirations than to him who conceives of a just distribution of comfort in an existence not idle, but without struggle. It would be a Nirvana glorious only in the absence of sorrow, but still perhaps a happy ending for our race. It may, after all, be our destiny. Nor can any right-minded man forbear his tribute to the good which Socialistic agitation has done. No man can tell how much misery it has prevented, or how much it will prevent. So, also, while we may regret the emotionalism which renders even so keen an intellect as that of Karl Marx an unsafe guide, we must, when we read his description of conditions for which he sought remedy, confess that he had been less a man had he been less emotional. The man whom daily contact with remediable misery will not render incompetent to always write logically, I would not wish to know. But it is the mission of such men to arouse action and not to finally determine its scope. The advocate may not be the judge. My animus is that I heartily desire most if not all the ends proposed by abstract Socialism, which I understand to be a perfectly just distribution of comfort. If, therefore, I am a critic of Socialism, I am a friendly critic, my objections to its program resting mainly on a conviction that it would not remove, but would intensify, the evils which it is intended to mitigate." That is quite sufficient in regard to the personal equation.

There appear to be, unfortunately, as many sects of Socialists as of Christians, and if "Capital" were a more clearly written book I should be of the opinion that it would be as much better for Socialists if all other books on Socialism were destroyed as it would be for Christians and Jews if all books on Theology were destroyed, except the Bible. By Socialism I mean what some Socialist writers call "Scientific Socialism."

"Marxism," it might be called. "Humanism," I think Marx would have preferred to call it, and I believe did call it, for he dealt with abstract doctrine applicable to men and not to nations, and his propaganda was the "International." Incidentally, as we pass on, we may notice in this connection the dilemma of American Socialists which they do not seem to realize. State Socialism has no logical place in a Socialistic program, for it merely substitutes the more deadly competition of nations for that of the individual, or even "trust" competition now existing, while Humanism, or Marxism, tends to a uniform condition of humanity which the American proletariat would fight tooth and nail because they would rightly believe that for them it would at present be a leveling down instead of leveling up.

Karl Marx was, of course, not the inventor of Socialism, nor was he, so far as I know, the originator of any of its fundamental doctrines,—the doctrine, for example, that all value is derived from labor was part of mediaeval clericalism,—but he first reduced it to coherent form and published it as a complete and definite system, and upon the issues, substantially as he formulated and left them, must Socialism stand or fall.

I must assume the members of the Ruskin Club to be familiar with the Marxian fundamental propositions, which I do not state because I shall confine my attack to the three derived propositions about which discussion mainly centers. We certainly do not want an exercise in serious dialectics after dinner, but I will say in passing that I do not think that any of his fundamental propositions are true, or that his theory of value has a single sound leg to stand on, and as for what he calls "surplus value," I doubt whether there be such a thing. At any rate he has not proved it, nor can it be proved, without taking into consideration the enormous number of industrial failures, as well as the more limited number of industrial successes—and there are no data for that purpose. I may also mention as what seems to me a fatal flaw in Socialistic philosophy, its concentration upon the conditions of industrial society, without adequate conception of a provision for the requirements of agriculture. Industrialism and commercialism are doubtless conveniences essential to our present civilization; but if every factory and all commerce were blotted from the earth the world would go right along, and when the necessary millions had perished in the adjustment, those remaining would be as happy as ever. Mankind adjusts itself to new environments very readily. We here in cities talking wisely on these things are wholly unnecessary. The farmer is essential, because without him we should starve. Nobody else is essential. We must not get the big-head. Economical farming on Socialistic methods is impossible, and any successful system of Social betterment must be based on the requirements of economical farming.

Finally, to conclude this preliminary reconnaissance, the attitude of Socialism to religion is wholly unjustifiable. I am profoundly convinced that the groveling heathen, who in sincerity bows down to a "bloomin' idol made of mud," as Kipling puts it, has in him the propagation of a nobler and happier posterity than the most cultured cosmopolitan who is destitute of reverence. The church and the synagogue are the only existing institutions of modern society which are engaged in the work of upbuilding and strengthening that rugged personal character which is the only sure foundation of any worthy civilization.

I do not discuss the fundamental Marxian propositions for two reasons. In the first place, it would be laborious beyond measure for me, and dreary beyond measure for you. For example, the bottom stone in the foundation of the sub-basement of the Marxian edifice is the proposition that the equation

$$\begin{aligned} X \text{ commodity A} &= y \text{ commodity B} \\ &\text{essentially differs from the equation} \\ y \text{ Commodity B} &= X \text{ Commodity A.} \end{aligned}$$

Now, a discussion whether there is between these two equations a difference which it is socially necessary to take account of, is a thing to be put into books where it can be skipped, and not imposed in cold blood even on intellectual enemies. Personally I do not believe there is, for I do not think that social phenomena can be dealt with by the rigorous methods of mathematics. One can never be sure that the unknown quantities are all accounted for. But whether this or similar propositions are essential to the discussion of the theory of surplus value or not, I do not describe them because they are of no particular importance.

Socialism is not based upon the Marxian theory of value, but the Marxian theory of value was evolved in an endeavor to fix a scientific basis for a popular movement already fully under way. Socialism is not based on reason, but emotion; not on reflection, but desire; it is not scientific, but popular. If every Socialist on earth should concede that the Marxian theory of surplus value had been knocked into smithereens, it would have no more effect on the progress of Socialism than the gentle zephyr of a June day on the hide of a rhinoceros. Socialism must be attacked in the derived propositions about which popular discussion centers, and the assault must be, not to prove that the doctrines are scientifically unsound, but that they tend to the impoverishment and debasement of the masses. These propositions are three, and I lay down as my thesis—for I abhor defensive warfare—that

Rent is rights
Interest is rights
Profits are right,

and that they are all three ethically and economically justified, and are in fact essential to the happiness and progress of the race, and more especially to those who labor with their hands.

Now, first, *rent*: I confess that I have no patience with any one who claims, as an inherent right, the exclusive ownership of any part of the earth. He might as well claim ownership in a section of air. In this I am very certain that I have the hearty concurrence of every member of this Club. I am so sure of this, in fact, that I am going to make that assumption, in which we all agree, the starting point of a little dialogue, in which, after the manner of Plato, I will put Socrates at one end of the discussion, and some of his friends, whom we will suppose to be Phædo, and Crito, and Simmias, and the rest at the other, and we will let Socrates and Phædo carry on the conversation, which might run as follows:

Socrates—We are agreed, then, that no man has any right inherent in himself to the ownership of land.

Phædo—Certainly, we agree to that. Such a thing is absurd, for the earth is a gift to the human race, and not to particular men.

Socrates—I am glad that you think so, and am sure we shall continue to agree. And if no one man has any right to exclusive ownership of land, neither have any two men, since it is plain that neither could convey to himself and another any right which he did not possess, nor could two men together by any means get lawful title to what neither was entitled to hold.

Phædo—You are doubtless right, Socrates. I do not think any man could dispute that.

Socrates—And if neither one man nor two men can acquire lawful title to land, neither for the same reason could any number, no matter how great, acquire lawful title.

Phædo—That certainly follows from what we have already agreed to.

Socrates—And it makes no difference how small or how great a portion of land may be. No man and no number of men can acquire lawful ownership of it.

Phædo—That is also so plainly true that it seems hardly worth while to say it. It certainly makes no difference whether the land be a square furlong or a continent.

Socrates—As you say, Phædo, that is very evident. The earth belongs to mankind, and all men are by nature sharers in its benefits.

Phædo—I trust that you will understand that I agree with you in that, and so make an end of it.

Socrates—It is perhaps best that we be very sure that we agree as we go on, so that if we should at any time disagree, we do not need to go far back to find where our difference began. The earth is the property of men in common, and each has an undivided share in its possession.

Phædo—That is another thing too plain to be disputed.

Socrates—And when men hold property in common, each has as much right to all parts of it as another.

Phædo—To be sure. I do not see why we need waste time in mentioning things so plain and so trivial.

Socrates—And when men own property they may do with it as they please, and property which men own

jointly they may visit and remain upon, the one as much as the other.

Phædo—Unquestionably that is so, and we should do better to go to sleep in the shade, somewhere, than to spend time in repeating things so simple.

Socrates—Be patient, Phædo, and in time we may find somewhat wherein we do not so perfectly agree. But whatever property men have the right to visit and remain upon they are always free to use in common with their fellow owners.

Phædo—Certainly. Will you never, O Socrates, have done with this?

Socrates—And Chinamen, therefore, have full right to come and live in California.

Phædo (and the rest)—We will all see them in hell first.

And I am very certain that every Socialist in California will agree both with the premises and the conclusion.

But we might try another course of reasoning by which we may perhaps more easily reach the predetermined conclusion, and we will let the same parties carry on the dialogue, which is a most delightful way of reasoning when, as in the case of Plato and myself, the same person conducts both sides of the discussion. It might run in this way:

Phædo—We have come, Socrates, to discuss with you, if you will permit us, the question of the ownership of land. Crito and Hippias and myself and others were considering that subject the other day, and we were not able to agree. Hippocrates, whom you know, has lately returned from the region of Mount Olympus, and as he was hunting one day on the lower slopes of the mountain, he came, haply, upon a beautiful vale, fertile and well watered, wherein was no habitation or sign of man. The soft breezes blew gently over the rich green plain whereon the red deer grazed peacefully and turned not at his approach. And when Hippocrates returned from his hunt he found upon inquiry that no man of the region knew of that vale or had ever heard thereof. So, as he had marked the entrance thereto, he returned thither with the intent to remain there for a space. And remaining there through the warm summer he fenced in the vale and the deer in it, and built him an house, and remained there a full year. But certain concerns of his family at that time constrained Hippocrates to return to Athens, and since he can no more live in his vale he offered to sell it to Hipparchus for a talent of silver for a place to keep summer boarders. And Hipparchus was content; but when they repaired to the Demosion to exchange the price for the deed, Hippocrates was unable to produce any parchment showing his title to the vale. And when he was unable to do that, Hipparchus would not pay down his silver, until he could make further inquiry. The next day, we all, meeting at the house of Phidias, fell to debating whether Hippocrates owned the land and could sell it to Hipparchus. And some said one thing and some another, and in the end we agreed that when some of us were next together, we would go to the house of Socrates, and if he were content, we would discuss the matter with him. And today happening to so meet we have come to you, Socrates, and would be glad to hear whether you think Hippocrates owns that vale, and may sell it or no.

Socrates—You are very welcome, Phædo, and your friends, and as for the matter you name, I shall be glad to talk of it with you and see if we can come to some understanding of it. But before we can proceed in the discussion, it will be necessary to find some starting point upon which we can all agree, because until we agree, at the beginning, upon some one thing pertaining to the matter, as certain and not to be doubted, discussion is useless, but if we can find such a thing, which none of us doubt, we may be able to make something of the matter. I propose, therefore, O Phædo, that you propound some one statement which all you who have been discussing the matter believe.

Phædo—Of a truth, Socrates, we discussed the matter till the sun went down, but I do not remember any one thing to which we all agreed except that there is such a vale at the foot of Mount Olympus, as Hippocrates describes, and that he lived therein for a year. That we believe because Hippocrates so told us, and all Athens knows Hippocrates for a truthful man.

Socrates—That is something, for all truth is useful; but it does not seem to me to be such a truth as will well serve for a foundation from which we may penetrate, as one might say, the very bowels of the subject. I pray you to propound some other.

Phædo—Truly, Socrates, I cannot, nor can we any of us, for upon nothing else pertaining to the matter are we able to agree.

Socrates—If it please you, then, I will propound a saying and see if you agree with me.

Phædo—We shall be very glad if you will.

Socrates—I suggest, then, that we begin by agreeing, if we are able to do so, that the gods have given the earth to man for his use.

Phædo—Surely that seems to be true.

Socrates—I am glad that you think favorably of it, but that is not sufficient if we are to reason upon it, because that upon which we found our argument must be what we accept as absolute truth.

Phædo—I think the earth was made for mankind, but if in our conversation something should also seem true, and yet contradictory to that, I know not what I should think.

Socrates—Let us, then, think of something else: The earth is at any rate surely for the use of some beings. The mighty Atlas would never sustain it upon his broad shoulders if it did nobody good.

Phædo—That, at least, is certain, Socrates.

Socrates—And it must be for beings who can make use of it and enjoy it.

Phædo—That also is true.

Socrates—And beings which can use and enjoy the earth must be living beings.

Phædo—Nobody will deny that.

Socrates—And there are no living things except the gods, mankind, the lower animals, and plants.

Phædo—I agree to that.

Socrates—And it is plain that the gods did not build the earth for themselves, for they do not live upon it, except on Olympus, and nowhere does the earth produce ambrosia and nectar, which are the food of the gods.

Phædo—That is true, for the gods live in the heavens and in the nether world, and not upon the earth.

Socrates—And the plants do not use the earth, or enjoy it, although they live upon it, but they are themselves used and enjoyed by man and beasts.

Phædo—Certainly the earth was not made for the plants.

Socrates—And surely as between man and the lower animals, the earth was intended for man.

Phædo—Certainly, that is what we think, but I do not know what the lion and the horse and the ox might say, for they certainly use the earth and enjoy it.

Socrates—But man is superior to the lower animals, and the superior cannot be subordinate to the inferior.

Phædo—I do not know how we can tell which is superior. The primordial cell in differentiating out of homogeneity into heterogeneity developed different qualities in different beings, and of the organs integrated from the heterogeneous elements each has its use and many are essential to life. In man the brain is more powerful than in the ox, but in the ox the stomach is more powerful than in man, and while both stomach and brain are necessary, yet is one with a weak brain and strong stomach doubtless happier than one with a weak stomach and strong brain. Is it not, then, true that the stomach is nobler than the brain, and if so, then the pig and the lion and the goat, which have strong stomachs, nobler than man, whose stomach could in nowise digest carrion, or alfalfa, or tin cans, and therefore may it not be that the earth was made for the lower animals, who can use more of its products than man?

Socrates—That is a deep thought, O Phædo, which shows that you are well up in your Spencer, although shy in your surgery, for it is true that the stomach has been removed from a man who lived happy ever after, while neither man nor beast ever lived a minute after his brains were knocked out; but is it not true that it is by the function of the brain that man makes his powers more effective than those of animals stronger than he, so that he is able to bear rule over all the lower animals and either exterminate them from the earth or make them to serve him?

Phædo—Yes, that is true.

Socrates—And we cannot say that the earth was made for beasts which themselves are made to serve the purpose of man, for as plants are consumed by beasts, so beasts are consumed by man who acquires for his own use and enjoyment whatever power is generated by the organs of all other living things.

Phædo—That is true, and I can now see that the earth was not made by the gods for themselves, or for plants or beasts.

Socrates—Therefore it appears to me that it must have been made for man.

Phædo—That is true, and I now agree that the earth was made for man.

Socrates—Then, since we have found a common starting point, we may go on with our conversation. We have proved that the earth was made for man, because man, by powers inherent in himself, can overcome all other living things on the earth and subject them to his uses.

Phædo—Yes, we have proved that.

Socrates—And the real source of his kingship is power.

Phædo—That must be true.

Socrates—And force is power applied to some object, so that power and force may be spoken of as the same thing.

Phædo—Certainly.

Socrates—And where power lies, there and there only is sovereignty, and where power ends sovereignty finds its limit. So that, for example, if the lion could subdue man and the other animals, the earth would be for the use of the lion.

Phædo—That is plain.

Socrates—And if a company of men should find an island and go and live upon it and be strong enough to subdue the wild animals and keep out other men, that island would be for their use.

Phædo—That follows, because sovereignty goes with power exercised in force.

Socrates—And so if one man should find a vacant space and take possession, it would be his.

Phædo—That is true.

Socrates—And what belongs to man, man may dispose of as he will.

Phædo—All men agree to that.

Socrates—And, therefore, since Hippocrates has found a vacant space on the earth and taken possession thereof, and no man disputes his possession, it is his and he may sell it.

Phædo—That is certainly true, and I do not doubt that Hipparchus will now pay down his talent of silver and take over the vale in the Olympian forest.

Socrates—And if instead of finding an island the company of men had found an entire continent it would be theirs if they were strong enough to keep it.

Phædo—Surely that is so, for power is but concentrated ability to enjoy, and where most power lies, there lies most ability to enjoy, and therefore the highest possible aggregate of human happiness, in the attainment of which the will of the gods shall be done.

Socrates—And if a company can take part of a continent, but not the whole, whatever they are able to take is theirs.

Phædo—Undoubtedly.

Socrates—And what is theirs is not the property of others.

Phædo—By no means.

Socrates—And if it does not belong to others, others may not lawfully use it.

Phædo—Surely not.

Socrates—And they who do own it may prevent others from entering it.

Phædo—Surely, for hath not the poet said:

"That they shall take who have the power,
And they may keep who can."

Socrates—Therefore it is plain that the United States may keep Chinamen out of America.

Phædo—There can be no doubt of it whatever.

Socrates—And Chinese may keep Americans out of China.

Phædo—That is another story. One must never let his logic get the better of him.

And so we might play with these great subjects forever, with reasoning as leaky as a sieve, but good enough to catch the careless or the untrained.

One of the most interesting lectures which I ever listened to was one before the Economic League of San Francisco on the "Dialectics of Socialism." The lecturer was a very acute man, who would not for one moment be deceived by the sophistry of my Socrates and Phædo, but who, himself, made willing captives of his hearers by similar methods. I was unable to hear all his address, but when I reluctantly left, it appeared to me that he was expecting to prove that Socialism must be sound philosophy because it was contradictory to all human observation, experience, judgment and the dictates of sound common sense—and his large audience was plainly enough with him.

The dialectics of the schoolmen or their equivalent are useless in Social discussion. Social phenomena do not lend themselves to the rigorous formulas of mathematics and logic, for the human intellect is unable to discern and grasp all the factors of these problems. My travesty of Plato was intended to illustrate the difficulty of close reasoning on such topics.

Neither, on the other hand, are we to blindly follow the impulses of emotion which lead us to jump at a conclusion, support it with what reason we can, but reach it in any event. Emotion is the source of social power, but power unrestrained and undirected is dangerous. Energy created by the sight of distress must be controlled by reason or it will not relieve distress. And by reason I do not mean social syllogisms, of whose premises we are always uncertain, but conclusions half unconsciously formed in the mind as the result of human experience operating on human feeling—the practical wisdom which we call common sense. Human conduct, individual and aggregate, must be regulated and determined by the consensus of the judgment of the wisest made effective through its gradual acceptance as the judgment of the majority. Private ownership of land, with its accompanying rent, is justified, not by an imaginary inherent right in the individual, which has no real existence and so cannot be conveyed, but because *the interests of society require the stimulus to effort which private ownership and private ownership only can give*. And here I shall leave this point without the further illustration and elaboration with which I could torment you longer than you could keep awake. And with the other two points I will confine myself to the most condensed forms of statement.

INTEREST—Socialists and Non-Socialists agree that what a man makes is his. Socialists and I agree that every man is entitled to his just share of the Social dividend. I believe, and in this I suppose that Socialists would agree with me, that when a man gets his annual dividend he may use it, or keep it for future use. If, while he does not use his dividend, or the product of his labor, he permits others to use it to their profit, it seems to me that he is entitled to some satisfaction in compensation for his sacrifice. I believe it to the interest of society that he have it. It is by individual thrift that society accumulates, and it is wise to encourage thrift.

If I build a mill and, falling sick, cannot use it, it is fair that he who does use it shall pay me for my sacrifice in building it. If I forego possible satisfactions of any kind, those whom I permit to enjoy them should recompense me. And that is interest. Its foundation as a right rests not only on those natural sentiments of justice with which the normal man everywhere is endowed and behind which we cannot go, but on the interest of society to encourage the creation of savings funds to be employed for the benefit of society.

PROFITS—Private profit is far less a private right than a public necessity. Its absence would involve a waste which society could not endure. With individual operations controlled by fallible men enormous waste is inevitable. It is essential to society that this waste be minimized. No industrial or commercial enterprise can go on without risk. *Profit is the compensation for risk*. One of the things which I believe, but which cannot be proved, is that from the dawn of history losses to individuals by which society gained have exceeded profits to individuals, and the excess of these losses is the social accumulation, increased, of course, by residues left after individuals have got what they could. Whitney died poor, but mankind has the cotton-gin. Bell died rich, but there is a profit to mankind in the telephone. Socialists propose to assume risks and absorb profits. I do not believe society could afford this. I am profoundly convinced that under the Socialist program the inevitable waste would be so enormously increased as to result in disaster approaching a social cataclysm. This is an old argument whose validity Socialists scout. Nevertheless I believe it sound. The number of these whose intellectual and physical strength is sufficient for the wisest direction of great enterprises is very small. Some who are interested in our great industrial trusts carry heavy insurance on the life of Mr. Morgan, lest he die and leave no successor. If the natural ability is found its possessor will necessarily lack the knowledge which Mr. Morgan has accumulated, and in the light of which he directs his operations. It is essential that great operations—and the business of the future will be conducted on a great scale—be directed by great wisdom and power. The possessors of high qualities we now discover by the trying-out process. They can be discovered in no other way, and great effort can be secured only by the hope of great reward. Until human nature changes we can expect nothing different. Socialism implies popular selection of industrial leadership. Wherever tried thus far in the world's history there has usually been abject failure. The

mass can choose leaders in emotion but not directors of industry. The selection of experts by the non-expert can be wise only by accident. If the selection is not popular, then Socialism is tyranny, as its enemies charge. If it be popular, or in so far as it is popular, direction is likely to fall to the great persuaders and not to the great directors. Never did a "people's party" yet escape the control of the unscrupulous. *No political movements result in so much political and social rascality as so-called popular movements originated by earnest and honest men.* I see no reason to suppose that the Socialistic direction of industrial affairs in any city would be directed from any other source than the back rooms of the saloons where political movements are now shaped. If the Socialistic program were to go into effect tomorrow morning there would be here tonight neither lecturer nor audience. The good dinner would remain untasted in the ovens. Every mortal soul of us would be scooting from one social magnate to another to assure that we were on the slate for the soft jobs and that nobody was crowding us off. I have no faith in human nature except as it is constantly strengthened and purified by struggle. That struggle is an irrepressible conflict existing in all nature, and from which man cannot escape. It is better for mankind that it go on openly and in more or less accord with known rules of warfare than in the secret conspiring chambers of the class which in the end controls popular movement. All serious conflict involves evil, but it is also strengthening to the race. I wish misery could be banished from the world, but I fear that it cannot be so banished. I have little confidence in human ability to so thoroughly comprehend the structure and functions of the social body as to correctly foretell the steps in its evolution, or prescribe constitutional remedies which will banish social disease. If I were a social reformer—and were I with my present knowledge still an ingenuous youth in the fulness of strength with my life before me I do not know that I would not be a social reformer—I would profess myself a social agnostic, and prosecute my mission by the methods of the opportunist. I would endeavor to direct the social ax to the most obvious and obtrusive roots of the social evil, and having removed them and watched the result, would then determine what to do next. Possibly I would endeavor to begin with the abolition of wills and collateral inheritance, and so limiting direct inheritance that no man able to work should escape its necessity by reason of the labor of his forefathers. I might say that I recognized the vested rights of the Astors to the soil on Manhattan Island, but that I recognized no right as vested in beings yet unborn. I might say that it was sufficient stimulation and reward for the most eminent social endeavor to select, within reason, the objects of public utility to which resulting accumulations should be applied and to superintend during one's lifetime their application to those purposes. I might think in this way, and might not, were I an enthusiastic social reformer in the heyday of youth, but it appears to me now that at any rate we shall make most progress toward ultimate universal happiness if we recognize that out of the increasing strenuousness of our conflict there is coming constantly increasing comfort and better division thereof, and if we direct that portion of our energies which we devote to the service of mankind toward such changes in the direction of the social impulse as can be made without impairing the force of the evolutionary movement, rather than to those which involve the reversal of the direction of the force with the resulting danger of explosion and collapse. collapse.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A CRITIQUE OF SOCIALISM ***

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