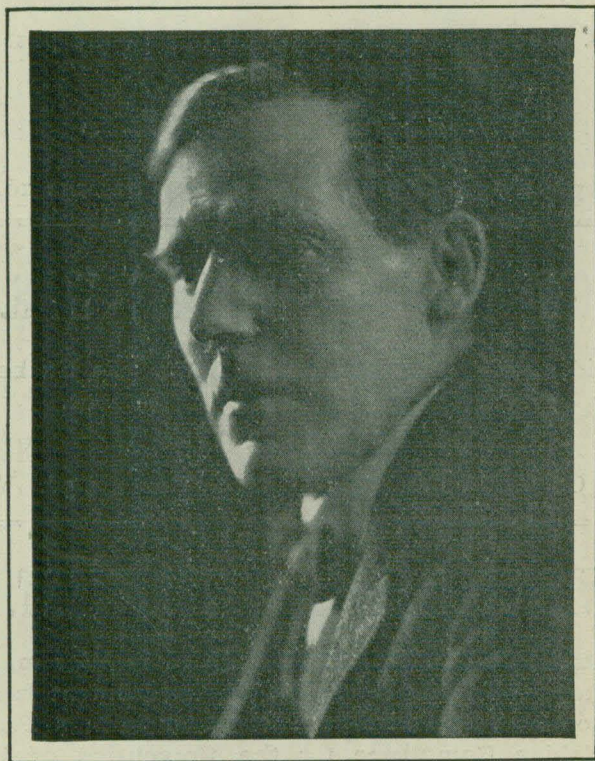


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THE PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIALISM.

What is the Aim of Civilization ?

SOcialism is the attempt to put a certain theory of human nature into political practice. If it is separated from that theory, it loses all its virtue and its sense of direction. It becomes a mere mechanical expedient, and might easily produce that Servile State about which its opponents are always talking.

My aim in this tract is to state that theory, and to show how Socialism owes its virtue to it and its sense of direction.

We are all agreed that we have attained to a certain amount of civilization, and that we wish to attain to more of it. We are also agreed that civilization has an aim—in that it differs from barbarism, which has no aim—but there are two opposed theories about the aim of civilization, and they may be stated shortly thus : the one theory says that the aim of civilization is to organize the struggle for life ; the other that it is to transcend the struggle for life.

Each theory is based upon a certain view of human nature. The first assumes that human nature is, and always must be, controlled by the struggle for life. Men have been made what they are by that struggle, and it is, necessarily, the only business of their lives. The best they can do is to wage it efficiently ; and the aim, the only possible aim, of civilization is to wage it so.

That phrase, *the struggle for life*, is often misunderstood by those who wish to misunderstand it for their own purposes. It does not mean, necessarily, a struggle between men. It does not mean that life is a substance of which there is not enough to go round, so that one man must always be fighting with another for it. A man struggles for life when he fights with a disease ; and men certainly have discovered that they can carry on the struggle for life better by co-operation than by fighting with each other. When, therefore, this theory says that men are controlled by the struggle for life, it means, not that they must necessarily be always struggling with each other, but that their final aim is to go on living, and that civilization is an organized and co-operative effort to go on living.

Quantity or Quality of Life.

There is one obvious objection to this theory, which seems fatal at first sight, namely, that, as a matter of fact, individual men are often ready to sacrifice their lives for others. But the answer made to that objection is that there is in men, not only an instinct for self-preservation, but also an instinct for race-preservation. It is this instinct for race-preservation which gives us what we call our higher values. We value in men those qualities which make for race-preservation more highly than those which make for self-preservation. But, according to this theory, all our values are ultimately survival values, though we may not know it. Those

emotions which seem to us the noblest are aroused in us by whatever makes for the preservation of the race. There is some power in us which, unknown to ourselves, always aims at that, and which imposes illusions upon us so that our instinct of self-preservation may be subordinate to our instinct of race-preservation. For, without those illusions, the man who has risen superior to self-preservation would care nothing for race-preservation. The good man, as it seems to us, prefers quality of life to quantity. Without quality life would be worthless to him. But this quality is all an illusion. He only gets the sense of quality in life by doing that which secures quantity of life for others. He holds life cheap for himself so that he may have the glory of giving that which he holds cheap to others. And those others, too, can only have the sense of quality in their own lives if they are ready to sacrifice them so that yet others may have quantity. Ultimately there is nothing but quantity of life to be lived for, however much we may disguise the fact to ourselves.

So civilization must be an organization of the struggle for life, since there is nothing else to be struggled for. This is a universe in which living consists of the effort to go on living, whether the individual makes that effort for himself or for the community. Civilization would induce him to make it for the community, but only so that the community, now or in the future, may have that quantity of life which the individual is trained to despise for himself; and civilization will persist and improve only if men are continually trained to despise that which alone is worth having.

Socialism is for Quality of Life.

The other theory, as I have said, holds that the aim of civilization is to transcend the struggle for life, and it is based upon the belief that men are not ultimately controlled by the struggle for life, and that their proper business in life is to escape from the control of it as completely as possible. It denies that all our values are survival values, or that those emotions which seem to us the noblest are aroused in us by what makes for the preservation of the race. A man does not love truth or spend his life in seeking it because it makes for the preservation of the race, but because it is truth, and therefore to be loved for its own sake. He does not do what is right because it makes for the preservation of the race, but because it is right, and therefore to be done for its own sake. He does not make beautiful things for the preservation of the race, but because they are beautiful, and therefore to be made for their own sake. And his proper business in life is to do all these things for their own sake, and to live, not that he may go on living, but that he may do them.

To the question why they should be worth doing for their own sake, there is no answer, because they are worth doing for their own sake. They are absolutes, and cannot be expressed in terms of anything else. Man is of such a nature that he desires to do those things for their own sake, and the universe is of such a nature that they are worth doing for their own sake. If he asks what is right,

the answer is that which he permanently finds worth doing for its own sake, and not so that he may go on living. For life itself is not an absolute, but merely a condition of action. We must think of life in terms of those things which we do for their own sake, and not of those things in terms of life. And the more we do things for their own sake, the more clearly we shall see what things are to be done for their own sake. If we think that the aim of life is to go on living, we shall not see anything clearly at all.

There is no Safety in Altruism.

This theory is dogmatic, but not more dogmatic than the other ; and its appeal is to experience, whereas the appeal of the other is mainly to facts observed about savages or animals. But my object in this pamphlet is, not so much to defend one theory or to attack the other, as to show which is consistent with Socialism and which is not. Socialism, I believe, is necessarily based upon the theory that the aim of civilization is to transcend the struggle for life ; and, unless it is based upon that theory, it loses its virtue and its sense of direction.

It might be contended that each theory will lead to altruism, and therefore that it does not matter practically which theory you hold. An altruistic organization of society, a Socialistic organization, is the logical result of both. But altruism is an ugly word, and may mean a very ugly thing. If you believe that the proper aim of civilization is to organize the struggle for life, that quantity of life for the race is the highest thing that a community can aim at, then the individual has no rights for you. Not only may he sacrifice himself, but he may also be sacrificed, for the community. Quantity of life is the only absolute ; and everything else, including all our morality, is to be thought of in terms of it. There is nothing to stop you from killing a minority so that a majority may live longer. There is nothing to keep you from attempting to breed a race of over-men, at the expense of all those whom you consider under-men, if you believe that life for the race of over-men will be longer and more secure. All this you may do quite altruistically, in that you do it, not for your own advantage, but for the better preservation of the race. If quantity of life is your final aim, you will have no desire to provide quality of life for the individual, unless you think that quality for him means quantity for the race ; and there is no certainty whatever that you will think this, since quality of life is to you a mere illusion. As for pity and virtues of that kind, they will not be virtues to you at all, if they seem to you to endanger race-preservation. You will think altogether in terms of the race, and not at all in terms of the individual ; and altruism may lead you, if you have the power, into a tyranny which will be utterly ruthless because you think it scientific.

The Sanctity of the Individual.

But the theory that the aim of civilization is to transcend the struggle for life is a theory which necessarily implies the sanctity of

the individual. For if the aim of civilization is to transcend the struggle for life, its aim is that every individual here and now shall transcend it; and, so far as any one man is prevented from transcending it, there is failure of civilization. According to this theory there are desires in every man, which we may call desires of the spirit; a desire to do what is right for its own sake, a desire to discover the truth for its own sake, and a desire to make things as beautiful or as well as they can be made for the sake of making them well. And the proper object of life is to satisfy these desires, not to go on living. Further, Society is an association of human beings with the object of giving to all of them the opportunity to satisfy these desires. If it has not that object, it is vicious and perverse in its whole constitution. It must have other objects, of course, such as defence and the better organization of the struggle for life; but these are subsidiary to its main object, which is to give freedom to satisfy the desires of the spirit.

Now this is the only theory upon which what we call social justice can be securely based, for, if the aim is to give all men freedom to satisfy the desires of the spirit, it follows that some men must not have freedom at the expense of others. It is necessary that a mass of work should be done so that men may live; but, if all are to have an equal freedom, all must do their fair share of this work. And it will be a further aim of Society that men shall, as far as possible, satisfy the desires of the spirit in the work which they have to do. The test of all work which is not absolutely necessary will be—whether the worker can take pleasure in doing it well for its own sake. If he can, then it is worth doing; if he cannot, then it is an offence against civilization to force him to do it. It is not strict laws against luxury which are needed for civilization, but a sense of the iniquity of unnecessary and joyless labour. And this sense can only be based upon a belief in the sanctity of the individual, in his right to the satisfaction of his spiritual desires.

The other theory will not give social justice, because it will not aim at it. It will not assert the right of the individual to satisfy his spiritual desires, because it does not believe in the existence of spiritual desires. It only believes in existence itself without any further aims. It has no value for anything except existence itself, and all our other values it necessarily reduces to a value for existence and nothing more.

The Sacrifice of the Individual for the Race.

In practice, of course, there are few or none who carry this theory to its logical conclusion. But the theory is always with us and is always affecting our thought about social and political matters. It produces a kind of altruism which is dangerous because it necessarily denies the sanctity of the individual. For the only altruism which is consistent with this theory is an altruism which neglects the individual for the race, which exalts the struggle of the race for existence above the struggle of the individual. You cannot attain to altruism at all through this theory except by giving up the individual

for the race, except by valuing the race instinct for preservation more than the individual instinct. This valuing of the one more than the other is your religion, the principle upon which all your morality is based ; and there is nothing whatever to limit it in your theory. So it may become a fanaticism as cruel as any of those religious fanaticisms of the past which were based upon a belief in the paramount importance of salvation. For them there was nothing but the struggle for eternal life ; for this theory there is nothing but the struggle for temporal life. For both the individual, and his sanctity and freedom, are nothing compared with the struggle, and he may be sacrificed in any way which the struggle demands.

The German Error.

The only alternative which this theory permits to such inhuman altruism is the instinct of self-preservation with its merely barbaric selfishness. There is nothing in politics between anarchy and a State in which the individual has no rights. If anyone would say that the theory does not exist, or that it has no practical influence in any existing State, I would draw their attention to Germany at the present moment and to our own country for the last hundred years. Germany has developed that inhuman altruism for which the individual has no rights. Her whole conception of the State is that it is a unit in the struggle for life to which all individual rights must be sacrificed. The aim of the State, Treitschke says, is power ; but power to do what ? Power to survive as a State ; and to this power every individual and every individual conscience must be sacrificed. It does not matter that the Germans themselves consent to this sacrifice. You do not remain free because you willingly give up your freedom for something else. You do not keep your conscience because you have conscientiously surrendered it. The Germans talk of their idealism and their Kultur, but in their political life both are subordinate to the struggle for life itself, a struggle carried on with an altruism the more ruthless and the more dangerous both to themselves and to others, because it is altruism and not selfishness, because it has sacrificed the claims of the individual to the claims of the race.

It matters not that this altruism is for the German race and not for the human. That is, perhaps, merely a want of logic in detail ; or it may be that they think the human race has the best chance of surviving if the German race is supreme. In any case their altruism is based upon a belief that the individual must be sacrificed to the race ; their Socialism, so far as they are Socialists, is an organization of the struggle for life and not an attempt to transcend it. Needless to say, there are many attempts in Germany, as elsewhere, to transcend the struggle for life, but these are attempts of individuals. The theory of the State is not their theory, as the present war has proved.

The English Error.

In England, on the other hand, we have inclined more to anarchy than to the organization of the struggle for life, because we have

trusted rather to the instinct of self-preservation than to the instinct of race-preservation. We have, very justly, disliked and distrusted the ruthless altruism which will allow no rights to the individual ; but we have based all his rights upon his instinct of self-preservation. We, no less than the Germans, have seen something holy in the struggle for life itself, believing it to be the ultimate and controlling fact of life. Politically, we too have believed that all values are only survival values. The only difference is that, for us, it is the survival of the individual that matters. It is his struggle that is holy and the source of all virtues.

“Competition is the soul of trade” and also the soul of the universe. We would rather carry on the necessary and holy war with each other individually than as a drilled and regimented nation with other nations. That is why the Germans despise us and we despise the Germans. We see the wickedness of their altruism, they see the wickedness of our individualism. They talk about our slums and we about their shambles ; and we are both right. At the present moment their altruism is a danger to all the world and must be withstood. But our individualism is a danger to ourselves always ; and the source of the danger in both cases is the same doctrine, that doctrine which says that there is nothing worth having in life except life itself.

But if you believe that life is worth having only for certain things that can be done in life, if you desire quality of life rather than quantity, you will not think the struggle for life holy, whether a struggle of individuals or of larger units such as nations. For life is not worth having on the terms that it alone is worth struggling for. It is merely a condition precedent to the doing of those other things which are worth doing ; and the State exists not for its own power, which means the survival of its members or some of them, but so that its members may all be able to do those things which are worth doing. We have discovered by experience, if we do not all know it in our hearts, that those things which are worth doing for their own sake are best done in co-operation, can indeed only be securely and persistently and largely done, when men are able to forget the struggle for life in co-operation ; for it is only co-operation which enables them to forget the struggle for life for one moment. Every State, every degree of civilization, aims at a certain amount of co-operation, and is kept in being only because men are able to forget themselves in co-operation. The question is therefore, the ultimate political question, why shall they co-operate? No individualist can give a clear answer to that question. No Socialist can be logically and thoroughly a Socialist, unless he gives the right answer—which is that they shall co-operate so that they may, as far as possible, escape from the struggle for life to the doing of those things which are worth doing for their own sake.

The Proper Purpose of Co-operation.

Co-operation itself is one of the things that are worth doing for their own sake. It is morally right, as conflict is morally

wrong. It is true, of course, that men may co-operate for a wrong purpose, but even then they get some moral or spiritual satisfaction in their co-operation, in their self-forgetfulness. The German Army, because of its co-operation, is not morally as low as a footpad. The individual members of it do display certain virtues, and often very high ones, which they could not display if they were footpads. But their co-operation is a danger to the world because its purpose is bad, because it does not aim at something which is worth doing for its own sake, but merely for national success in the struggle for life. There is not complete self-forgetfulness in it, but only self-forgetfulness for the sake of a national egotism in which every German self has a part.

As co-operation implies self-forgetfulness, so its ultimate aim should be one in which self is forgotten, one free from egoism, national as well as individual; otherwise it will be dangerous because of its power, and will raise up a desperate opposition against itself. One can easily imagine a world of highly organized States rushing to a conflict far worse than the present one, and destroying all civilization in the course of it, if their Socialism was controlled by national egotism, if the aim of their co-operation was power, and not the doing of those things in which men forget all egoism. Co-operation, however far it is carried, must be dangerous, and must raise up enemies and provoke conflicts, unless its aim is the doing of those things which are worth doing for their own sake. So long as that is its aim, there is no danger in it, either of tyranny within the State or of aggression upon other States; and with that aim it may be carried as far as possible without fear of tyranny or aggression.

That, therefore, is the test of Socialism. Is its consistent co-operation that it aims at, a co-operation which means self-forgetfulness both in its process and in its ultimate aim, or is it an inconsistent co-operation, in which men forget themselves so that they may ultimately in some way satisfy their egotism? If the latter, it is dangerous in proportion to its efficiency. Aiming at power, it leads to war; aiming at comfort, it leads to stagnation. But if the former, there is no danger in it, since the more men forget themselves, the more they wish to forget themselves, and in forgetting themselves they can do no harm to each other. But they can only consistently and completely forget themselves if they are aiming at those things which are worth doing for their own sake, at doing what is right for the sake of doing it, at discovering the truth for the sake of the truth, at producing what is beautiful for the sake of what is beautiful.

Men have a desire to do what is right, and that, not for any ulterior benefit to themselves, but simply because it is right. When they see it to be right, they wish to do it. That is what we mean by doing right; it is not right if we do it for some ulterior purpose. So they have a desire for the truth, and they wish to discover it because it is the truth, and for no other reason. When we say that a man has a love of the truth, we mean that he loves it for its own sake, and not because he hopes in some way to profit by it.

The Imposition of Morality on the Poor.

Now, in our pursuit of all these things for their own sake, we are constantly hindered by the struggle for life. The mass of men, by reason of their poverty, have hardly any chance at all of exercising their intellectual or æsthetic faculties, and we take it for granted that they ought to be satisfied with exercising their moral faculties. The business of the poor is to be good. But a man cannot be good if he is confined to the exercise of his moral faculties alone, and we cannot be good if we confine him to it. Spiritual health consists in the exercise of all spiritual faculties, the intellectual and the æsthetic as well as the moral. If we wish the poor only to be good, we may be sure that we wish them to be good for our own profit. Their goodness to us means such conduct as will make us most comfortable, which is not goodness at all, but merely submission to a moral code imposed upon them. If we wish them to be good for our profit, we misunderstand the very nature of goodness and cause them also to misunderstand it. If we are to understand the nature of goodness ourselves, or to give them a chance of understanding it, we must not see their goodness in terms of our convenience. Our aim must be to release them from the pressure of the struggle for life, so that they may exercise all their spiritual faculties, so that they may have that freedom in which alone a man can do what is right for its own sake, can pursue truth for its own sake, and can enjoy and produce beauty for its own sake.

That freedom is very far off from all of us at present, from the rich no less than from the poor. In a society like ours the rich fear truth and are stinted of beauty, and their very conception of goodness is perverted by their fear of truth and by the general penury of beauty. They, anxious to maintain their position, are subject to the struggle for life no less than the poor. The only difference is that they exact more from life than the poor do, and therefore struggle for more. But their sense of the absolute, of those things which are worth doing for their own sake, is just as weak as if they were poor themselves. It is not spiritual freedom that they aim at, but success in the struggle for life; and therefore, not aiming at spiritual freedom, they cannot attain to it.

Yet we can aim at spiritual freedom, and we can understand that it is only to be reached if we aim at it for all. A man cannot enjoy a private spiritual freedom in a society based upon injustice any more than he can enjoy health in a plague-stricken town. The very desire for spiritual freedom must arouse in him a desire that all shall have it. If he wishes to do what is right for its own sake, he must wish that all should have the chance of doing what is right for its own sake. If he wishes to know the truth for its own sake, he must wish that all should have the chance of knowing it. If he wishes to make things beautiful for the sake of their beauty, he must wish that all should have the chance of making them so. And where the mass of men have not this chance or this desire, he finds himself continually thwarted in his own aims. Right is wrong, truth is falsehood, beauty is ugliness, to a society which does not

desire these things for their own sake. We must desire them for their own sake, if we are to know what they are ; and we must wish for a society in which every man shall desire them for their own sake, a society in which the obstacles to spiritual freedom shall be removed.

The Desire for Spiritual Freedom is the Basis of Socialism.

So the desire for spiritual freedom is the basis, the only basis, of Socialism. Without it co-operation will mean merely tyranny ; it will be a means by which some will exercise their "will to power" over others. It will be a change in the organization of society, but merely one that will give those who start rich more power than ever over those who start poor. There is in everyone a will to power, just as there is a sexual instinct. But this will to power is, if indulged, more of an enemy to spiritual freedom than the sexual instinct. If I am possessed by the will to power, I cannot be a saint or a philosopher or an artist ; I cannot even wish to be any of these. I shall wish for nothing except to exercise my own will ; and, because I have no sense of the absolute, I shall not know what to exercise it upon. Even if I think that I aim at the truth, my sense of the truth will be continually perverted by my will to power. I shall aim at freedom to do what I want to do, but what I want to do will not be dictated to me by a desire for spiritual freedom ; and this wilful freedom of mine will mean slavery for others.

Hence the extreme importance that the fundamental doctrines of Socialism should be clearly defined and held by all Socialists ; that Socialism should be desired for the right reason, not for the wrong ; that it should mean to every Socialist spiritual freedom, and not an organization by which he shall be able to work his will upon other men. Before the desire for Socialism, there should be the desire for spiritual freedom. And Socialism should endeavour to prove that it is the natural and inevitable product of the desire for spiritual freedom. We wish for a society in which all men shall have the chance of doing what is right for the sake of doing it, of seeking truth for truth's sake, of producing beauty for beauty's sake. We believe that in every man there is the desire to do those things, that no man can be happy except through the satisfaction of this desire. Further, we believe that this desire can only be satisfied in common and in a society whose chief aim is the common satisfaction of it. Without that aim a society is blind. It has no test by which to distinguish progress from reaction, civilization from barbarism, freedom from tyranny. It may be engaged in incessant changes and adjustments, all of which will be merely the exercise of the will to power by one class or another. It may organize itself into a very high state of efficiency, and then, in its pride at that efficiency, become only a unit in the struggle for life, and provoke against itself a continued opposition that will destroy it.

The Logic of Socialism.

There is, in fact, no theory of man's nature, or of the nature of the universe, upon which any social organization can be logically founded, except the theory that men do above all things, and beyond all things, desire spiritual freedom, and that they know how to use it when they have got it. And Socialism is the logical expression of this theory in political practice. It would carry the organization of society further than individualism would carry it, not merely because it believes in efficiency or any such meaningless abstraction, but because it believes that men do desire spiritual freedom above all things, and that they will aim at spiritual freedom individually whenever they have enough control of the struggle for life to do so. This is the faith of Socialism, a faith in the mind of man, not in mere mechanical efficiency, a belief that when men are all reasonably prosperous they will not fall in love with a dull prosperity. For it is not in man's nature to fall in love with dull prosperity. When he seems to do so, it is not because he is Philistine by nature, but because he is afraid to lose what he has. All those evils of prosperity about which reactionaries tell us are evils of insecurity or of unjust excess. No man, not even a poet, is the worse for a good meal of wholesome food. He will write poetry better on it than if he is over or underfed. Prosperity demoralizes men only when it is unusual. If it were common and equal, it would be to them a necessary condition of their spiritual activities.

But, further, we believe that a common and equal prosperity can be attained to only if society aims at spiritual freedom for all. To aim at prosperity alone will be to lose the way to it; therefore means to prosperity must not be imposed upon the unwilling poor by masterful philanthropists. Socialism is not, as its cleverer enemies pretend, a method of regimentation; although a capitalist tyranny might learn much from Socialism, if it were clever enough, and might even call itself Socialist. But the difference between such a tyranny and Socialism would always be in aim. It is difference of aim and difference of faith that produce difference of result. That is why we need to insist upon the importance of the Socialistic faith and to define it with almost theological precision. Unless it is so defined and held by all Socialists, Socialism will become what its enemies say it is, merely a method which an intelligent despot could use better than anyone else. He, of course, would ignore the logic of Socialism, or would apply it only so far as suited his own purposes, but that would matter little to him. To the Socialist, on the other hand, the logic of Socialism should be everything. It should connect his conception of the nature of man and of the universe with every detail of political action; otherwise Socialism will be to him also only a method and one in which his faith may easily be shaken.

Why is it that so many men, in their youth ardent Socialists, afterwards become reactionaries and yet do not know that they have changed? It is because they have never grasped the logic of Socialism, because it has never been to them anything but a method which they can apply to any purpose. There is logic in Socialism

only when it is a faith, not in method, but in the mind of man and the nature of the universe, and when this faith expresses itself in a method which is Socialism. I will not say that Socialism is a religion, any more than I would say that art is a religion. But Socialism and art are themselves only when they make or express certain affirmations about man and the universe in common with religion. Religion is an affirmation of absolute values. It tells us that we are to value certain things because they have value in themselves and not because they help us to go on living. It tells us that we live to do what is right because it is right, to discover truth because it is true, to make what is beautiful because it is beautiful, and that the purpose of our lives is not to go on living. So Socialism is the application of these affirmations to politics. It is an effort to attain to a state of society in which every man will be able to make these affirmations in practice as well as in theory; and it is based upon a religious belief that every man desires to make them and will make them if he is freed from the tyranny of circumstance. This belief may seem forlorn in our present society; it often does seem forlorn to us when we look at other men of a different class or nation. Yet it never seems forlorn to us when we look at ourselves. We make these affirmations about ourselves, and we are angry with a society which does not allow us to practise them. This anger, without logic, produces a belief in aristocracy. There are a few, ourselves among them, who ought to rule the world so that they may practise these affirmations, of which the vulgar herd are incapable either in theory or in practice. But, with the logic of religion, which tells us that other men are to themselves what we are to ourselves, it produces Socialism. We know that to be released from the pressure of the struggle for life would not demoralize us; why then should it demoralize the mob, which is only a name for men seen hostilely and in the mass? We want material freedom so that we may attain to spiritual freedom; and so do all other men, even those who think they can attain to it only at the expense of the mob. We all have the same desire; but there are some who think that this desire is peculiar to themselves and a few other aristocrats like them; and there are some who have forgone their desire from fear or from the tyranny of circumstance. For one reason or another they lack faith and the logic of faith. Their politics are disconnected from their desire and they are not Socialists. But the politics of the Socialist are connected with his desire and with his religion. He believes about other men what he wishes them to believe about himself. That is why he is a Socialist, why he is not afraid of trusting mankind as he himself would wish to be trusted. But unless he has this belief and this trust he is not a Socialist, whatever he may call himself.

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