



Socialism and Christianity.

For his many utterances in defence of Socialism at the late Church of England Congress in London, the Rev. W. Cummings, vicar of Owthorne in Yorkshire, received a lot of spiteful and cowardly anonymous abuse thro' the columns of a local newspaper. Replying to the prurient charges against Socialism, that it is "debasement," showed "ignorance and inferiority," and was bred of "envy and selfishness," and that Socialists were "blasphemous," "crazy priests," "low comedians," and quite a number of other choice things, the vicar vigorously said:

"The oft-repeated, oft-refuted parrot cry that "Socialism is directly opposed to the teaching of the Church and Christianity," supported only by torrents of abuse against anyone who will dare to deny it I have already disproved by showing that the writings of Moses, Isaiah, St. Matthew, St. James, etc., etc., are teeming with Socialistic sentiment. Anti-Socialists do not rebut this evidence, they merely denounce it as "blasphemous."

Then I appeal to the Early Church Fathers, to Saints Augustine, Basil, Chrysostom, Gregory, Ambrose, etc., whose writings are saturated with precisely the same sentiments as those expressed today on the Labour platform. This evidence also they do not rebut; instead, they denounce the Early Fathers as "antiquated and seditious," who "cannot reasonably be quoted as authorities on any modern (sic) question." With a delicate compliment of Socialism, all the more striking as coming unintentionally from so bitter an enemy, "they would rather accept Keir Hardie!"

Let me, however, follow them into their last ditch, and show, from the attitude of the modern Church, the amazing ignorance of their contention that "Socialism is opposed to the teaching of the Church." To refute this I will evoke a few from a great cloud of witnesses which no man could number.

Bishop Gore says: "Beyond question, according to the inten-

tion of Christ, the Church should represent a body living not only by a certain rule of faith, but also by a certain moral law, which puts the sternest restraints on the spirit of competition and on the acquisition of wealth."

The Bishop of Truro says: "Competition in business has become assimilated to the competition of war, and stands condemned."

The Bishop of Norwich says: "Individualism, of which we have had far too much, is 'Every man for himself.' Socialism says, 'Let every man seek one another's welfare.' This is the principle of Christianity."

The Bishop of Blackburn says: "The possession of land and money must be treated as a trust; wealth must be taxed for the common good. A great shaking of the social system is pending; no wise man can possibly help being both a Socialist and a Christian."

Canon Scott Holland says: "Individually we are powerless in face of the demoralising social situation in which we find ourselves entangled. The whole social centre must be shifted. We are all responsible for the poverty in our midst. Our individual efforts must be socialised, and the State is the only organism through which this can effectively be done."

The Dean of Durham says: "The main business of the Church of Christ in days to come will be found to take its origin out of social questions."

Dean Plumtre asserted: "There exists a strong affinity between the precepts of the Gospel and the theories of modern Socialists, whereas economic individualism is a most iniquitous and unchristian doctrine."

Bishop Westcott said: "Wealth in every form must be administered for the common good. God only can say of any possession, 'My own.' The clergy should seek to understand the aspirations of thoughtful artisans, and gain, even for novel and unpopular theories, a patient hearing from those who instinctively condemn them."

More powerful, however, than

the isolated statements of leading Churchmen is the significant pronouncements of the Lambeth Conferences of 1889 and 1897.

In 1889, in the presence of 115 Bishops of the Church of England, the late Archbishop of York, while accepting in the name of Christianity the fundamental programme of Socialism," spoke on the social question (says Prof. Nitti) "with even more breadth and boldness of view than many a Labour leader." The report drawn up by the Conference openly asserted that "between evolutionary Socialism and Christianity there is not the slightest contradiction."

In 1897 the Bishops said: "Christian authority must not attempt to identify Christian duty with an acceptance of an individual ownership of the means of production. A Christian community as a whole is morally responsible for the character of its own economic and social order, and for deciding to what extent matters affecting that order are to be left to individual initiative, and to the unregulated play of economic forces. The great need of the Church is the growth and extension of a serious, intelligent, and sympathetic opinion on social subjects. Churchmen should fearlessly draw attention to the various causes in our economic, industrial, and social system, which call for remedial measures."

Now, in power of abuse, the palm belongs to the Anti-Socialists. But in the appeal to facts I claim that I have checkmated them. They have demonstrated their own unreasoning bigotry by denying that the testimony of prophets, evangelists, and confessors have any value "in modern questions."

But how will they dispose of the Bishops? Anti-Socialists say: "Socialism flings filth and profanity," and "besmirches civilisation." The Bishops say: "Between Socialism and Christianity there is not the slightest contradiction." So, of course, they, too, are "blasphemous," "low comedians," and "crazy priests."

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