

## The Future of Socialism by Annie Besant

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THOSE who study carefully the tendencies of the times, must recognize the increasing power of the Socialist movement in this land, as well as in lands where it is a more militant force than it is here; and such thinkers will do well to consider along what lines it will work in days to come, and what will be the outlines of the Socialism which it is proposed to establish.

Now in dealing with that question, there is one idea that will dominate all that I say. Just as every Socialist declares that politics alone are utterly insufficient to make a happy and prosperous nation, just as he truly says that economics must be rightly understood and rightly applied, and that without that an understanding and application of political reform must fail and crumble, so I believe that economics alone are not enough to make a nation prosperous and free. Important as economics may be and are, behind economics lie men and women, and unless those men and women are trained into a noble humanity, economic schemes will fail as hopelessly as any political schemes can possibly do. For while it is true that the politician is building a house without a foundation, while it is true that Socialists are trying to make that foundation, still the foundation must be of good materials, or a rotten foundation will be as unfortunate to the house as no foundation at all. And there is a danger - a danger the more pressing the more successful the Socialist propaganda proves - that as the State takes over one thing after another, and tries to guide the great industries of the country for the common good, unless there are at the head of those industries, and unless there are as workers in those industries, trustworthy, upright, unselfish men. Socialism will inevitably fail. And if there is one thing more clear than another in looking through the efforts of the proletariat through the country, it is that they do not trust each other, either their leaders or their comrades. They have not that trust which alone can make success in any enterprise; and they need, not only trust in upright leaders, but they need the discipline, the subordination based on self-control, without which no undertaking can, in the long run, be successful. For if it is true, as it unfortunately is, that individualistic enterprises of production have been far more successful than co-operative production has proved itself to be, experimental and local as the whole thing has been, it is also true that when there is one vast co-operative body called the State, it will want the virtues that make good citizens, otherwise the Socialist State will crumble into pieces, as other States have done. And it is this point which seems to me to be lacking in Socialistic propaganda. It is this point which, more than anything else, led me outside the paths of Socialist propaganda into trying to form the material which the Socialist needs for the building of his State. For without that material, all efforts must fail, and the material cannot be made by outer organization alone. There is the tendency of advancing thought though growing less and less, I think, with every year, to regard the environment as everything, and the man as nothing, to think that the good environment will make the good man. It is forgotten that environment and living organism react the one upon the other; and though it is true that we need a better environment. though the environment of many men and women today is so unutterably vile that it is almost impossible that healthy plants can grow therein, still the fact that the man is a living creature, who more than any other adapts his environment to himself, is too much forgotten in the ordinary teaching of Socialism. And yet it is an essential part of a real Socialist propaganda. Now, I believe that the next great stage of civilisation will be Socialistic; that in the centuries that lie before us there will be realized many of the economic

conditions, probably all, that the Socialists of the day demand; but I see, at the same time, that unless the leaders of the Socialist party are educated far beyond the masses that they lead, and unless those masses understand that wisdom should give authority, all schemes must be wrecked; unless it be possible to have a Socialism where the wisest shall guide, and plan, and direct, I do not see that the mere change of economic conditions will make things so enormously better than they are today. For although it is true that by better economics we may change the outer conditions, man wants something more than food to eat and raiment to put on; man demands more and more, as he unfolds his inner powers, not only what the body demands imperatively, but that which the mind, and conscience, and Spirit, no less imperatively demand; and I fear lest this movement should be wrecked on the lack of recognition of the real nature of man, that he will be treated as a body only and not as a spiritual intelligence, and that against that rock all schemes will break; for we cannot ignore the real nature of man.

Now, in order to put before my readers some ideas that may lead to thought, I want to tell them the story of an ancient Socialism. They may take it as they please. I tell it as history; they may treat it as a fairy tale if they like. While I do not believe that history, for I call it history, repeats itself, while I do not think that the great lesson of Democracy is without its meaning to humanity, and has not to be learned by the nations of the world, I do believe that ancient Socialism also has lessons for the future, and that out of the Autocracy that is dead, and the Democracy that is trying to live, the nations will have to find some blend, which will give to the future civilization the advantages of both experiences; we shall not bring back the child state, for the man cannot go back into the child, but we may learn something of the benefits of the rule of that time, and see whether modern Democracy may not fashion in some way a method for calling the wisest to the helm of the State, instead of governing by numbers, which means governing by ignorance. Let me, then, tell my fairy tale. It was such a long time ago that I had better begin "once upon a time". Once upon a time, then, the masses of the people, undeveloped, unevolved, were literally in what we may call the child condition, ready to be governed, ready to admit the superiority of their elders; and these proletariats of the past were ruled by men of a far higher humanity, a more advanced humanity than their own. We see traces of that remaining in the civilization of ancient Egypt; we see traces of it in the civilization of Peru which was destroyed by Pizarro; we see traces of it still existing in India, that country which has not died where all its contemporaries have. We still may find in the village organization of India, in the village pañchayât - the village council of elders - the village ownership of land, the common responsibility of the village for every one of its members, and in many other ways, traces of that very ancient Socialism existing in our modern times. And it is because the rulers of the Empire do not understand the meaning of those ancient things, that they often make such serious blunders in their government of India at the present time. Trying to do right, they inevitably go wrong, and plunge the people into a far more hopeless condition than would be the case if they would look a little at the traditions which have come down from that ancient form of Socialism. To give one illustration: The old Socialism, that of which I am writing, vested all the land in the King, and that idea came down through all changes and conquests in India, until the Englishman began a new settlement in various great provinces; then, not realizing that this village ownership of the land was really part of the old system in which the land did not belong to any private person, he changed the ancient type of landlord who had no power to drive out the tenant, into a landlord of a modern kind, who was no longer representative of the monarch; the King technically owned the land, and took part of the profits from the tiller, so that the amount varied up and down, according to greatness or dearth of the harvest, and the "rent" thus did not starve the cultivator, because his food was the first claim to be satisfied; he changed all that into the English system of landlord and tenant, with a fixed money rent, and power of alienation to the tenant, and thus has reduced to a miserable condition of non-cultivation and poverty vast tracts of land, and thousands of people that were before in a comfortable and happy state. I mention those traces of the past still existing, that readers may not think the fairy tale quite as fanciful as if those traces did not exist to bear witness

that I do not wholly invent.

Now, with regard to this ancient Socialism, the King stood as an autocrat at the head ;around him a number of nobles, of priests - names that are well beloved among Socialists, but I must tell my story truly. That King, those nobles, those priests, were of a more developed humanity than the great labouring populations of the time, and the whole arrangement of the State was the arrangement of the family. Now, I believe that the arrangement of the family is the model for all healthy human organization, and that that great phrase: "From every one according to his capacities, to every one according to his needs" is the last, as it was the earliest word, of social organization. That was the rule which guided my Fairy State. Of that position of the King, again, there are many traces in Indian and Chinese books. He was the hardest-working man in the land, not simply in opening one institution or another, or in laying foundation-stones, but really the hardest worked man. The old law was: "Let the King wake that other men may sleep; let the King labour in order that other men may enjoy; let the King rule in order that the people may be happy." And behind the King in those old statutes - and here again the old legal institutes will help us - behind the King there was one power, given different names among different people, amongst the Indians they call it Justice - and that power was beyond the King, above the King, ruled the King, and he was only the administrator of the great Divine Law, in which King, nobles, priests and people all equally believed. So that we find it written that an evil King will be destroyed by Justice, with his house; and so in many another saying of the ancient books; and that principle ran through the whole of the theory of government. The governor was the responsible person, the criminal - there were few in those days, because crime mostly springs out of want and misery and want and misery were not common in those times - was the result of the errors of the ruler; the King was held ruler responsible for good government, and it was held, as Confucius once said to a King who complained about robbers: "If you, O King, did not rob, there would be fewer robberies in your land." And this was a practical, not only a theoretical idea in that old day; for in those days if a man lost anything by thieves, the King was bound to restore it fourfold - an admirable rule. In those days it was held that if the King did his duty in the training and teaching of his people, nobody would be inclined to thieve, so that the King's treasury was the place whence all restitutions were made to those who had suffered by theft. And that treasury, filled with the overflowings of the prosperity of the nation, was the place to which all men turned who were wronged, and the wrong had to be made right. And it was another admirable rule of the ancient time that when the religious teachers, who in these days would be called bishops, went round the land, and came to the King's Court, the first questions they asked were all practical questions. Have you looked after the widows and orphans in your country? Have you seen that the tiller of the soil has seed to sow his land? Have you seen that the artisan has the materials with which to work? And so on through every question on which the prosperity of the State depended.

Now, in the earliest days the Kings were what we call Divine Kings. By that we mean that they were men in whom the spiritual nature was developed, that duty was their guiding law; duty was really then the backbone of the monarch's authority, and the principles they laid down as to ownership, rule, and labour were very clear. In ownership, the whole of the land of the country technically belonged to the King and was administered for the common good; there were no taxes, for the revenue of the land met all public purposes. Out of one part of the land the whole of the nobles, and the whole of the law-making people, and the whole of the governors of the nation lived - one third of the land went for the support of the administrative class. The second third of the land went to the priesthood. What were they to do with it? They were bound to educate every child without charge of any sort. That was the first call of the priestly revenues. They were bound to support every sick person, every old person, every orphan, every one who was in need, who was suffering - hospitals, almshouses, asylums, everything wanted for the

helpless was kept up out of this part. And the result was that there was no idea of "Charity". Hence, "Charity" has always remained a religious duty. It was understood that that part of the national property was put aside for the helpless and the ignorant. Not for priestly pomp of priestly power, but for the service of humanity, was that third of the nation's land set aside. On them lay the whole burden of the support of the helpless; they administered, they did not own. The remaining third of the land was the property assigned for the support of the people, divided up into villages, townships, and so on. All those areas were held by the people who lived on them, and they could not be turned away from them. The land could not be alienated, because, theoretically, it was not theirs to sell; it could not be lost by debt or mortgage, for they had no right in it beyond the right of use - not the technical right of property. And that reminds me again, how, in India, that old principle has been lost sight of in modern land-legislation. Thousands of labourers have been turned into tramps of the road, because the land has become property as land, instead of only the use of the land being the property of the people

Thus was the land divided in my Fairy-State. The people tilled the whole of the land and pursued all manual occupations. That was their contribution to the State. They tilled their own land first. That was the most necessary tillage of all; after that the land of the priests, which was administered for the children, the sick, and the helpless; lastly; the land of the rulers. For the burden was always to come most heavily on the ruling class; and if seed ran short, or water ran short, first the land of the people was sown and watered, then the land of the priests, and lastly only the land of the rulers. And that was the principle that ran through the whole. For the man must give what he had to give, and the ignorant - not ignorant as people are ignorant now, for all were educated, but comparatively ignorant, because undeveloped in intelligence - gave the strength of their bodies, that was their capacity; and the priestly class gave the strength of their minds, for they were teachers, nurses, physicians; and the ruling class gave all their time and thought and energy to guiding the State, and planning its welfare, and defending it from attack.

One other purpose was served by the land of the priests. All great agricultural and other scientific experiments were made thereon; farms were kept up where experiments might be carried on, and all improvements might at once be scattered over the whole of the agricultural population; laboratories were maintained for scientific experiments, and anything that was discovered by intelligence became freely available for all, for the intellectual gave the strength of their minds; that was their capacity. There were no patent laws in those days, and no right claimed by any to live idly on the support of labour. It was a fair exchange of power all round - a division of duties; but all had duty, and all had some kind of work.

Now, another point on which things were very different then from now, was one which may seem to many wild and foolish; the higher the people in intelligence, the less need they have of wealth and amusement. Yet it was a rational idea; for the argument ran in this way: a man who is very undeveloped as to intelligence has few resources within himself; therefore, you must give him everything from outside which it is possible to give, to refine, to elevate, to train, and to make his life happy; the highly developed have endless resources within themselves. Therefore, all the amusements were freely open to the masses of the people. Every form of art was used in order to brighten and make happy their lives. If any one ran short of material good things, it must not be the people. They had nothing else except these outer things, which gradually drew out their sleeping powers, and raised them in the scale of intelligence. So, whoever else went short of amusement, they must be sure to have it placed within their reach. And the result was that they grew up far more refined than the masses of the people in any so-called civilized country today. We may measure very often the class of people that go to any place of amusement, by the vulgarity of the entertainment that is given. Now I have been through all the typical London amusements many years ago; therefore, I know whereof I write. If you go, say, to a theatre in the East End, you will generally find

fair ethics - the hero who is good always coming to the top, and the villain coming to grief. But the inanity of it! The lack of a real higher thought in it! That is a thing which makes one's heart weep on seeing the stones with which the ignorant are put off for bread, in the place which is the only place where they are able to learn, the places to which they go for so-called amusement. Now it is the people who want the best of everything that art can give. It is they who, because their homes are least artistic, need to have the beauty of art in order to refine them, and make them more human than too many of them are now. It is a remarkable thing that the Anglo-Saxon poor are more brutalized than the poor of any other nation, and I believe it is chiefly because of the utter absence of refinement in the amusements with which they try to fill the hours that are left over from labour. Moreover, where labour is too hard, amusement cannot really be healthy. Only by limited labour can you leave intelligence enough to profit by all that art is able to give the mind. And in my Fairy State no man or woman was overworked; and no child worked at all; and no man did compulsory work after forty-five years of age, whatever class he belonged to.

As either side of these age limits he worked, but before the lower, at education, and after the later, at any employment - literary, artistic, scientific - to which his abilities and tastes led him. So there was time for education, and time for art, and time for people to grow up into intelligent and useful life. But there is no time for such life now, where the child begins to labour as a half-timer and the old man is only grieved because at sixty or sixty-five he is too old to get something with which to fill his mouth. Far better for the labouring classes were those days, for they were not starved, nor overworked, nor under-amused. The State was shaped so that all might be happy, it being considered that happiness was the natural atmosphere for man. And so things went on for a long time.

Why did they change? Because humanity had to grow; and that was really the nursery stage, where the children were taken care of and cosseted up, and made much of, and humanity had to learn to be grown up, and had to go through the rough time of finding its own feet, and learning to walk. And gradually, as these greater men passed away, men of lower moral type took their places, men who began gradually to rule for themselves, and not for the people, to use their power for self-aggrandisement, and not for service. And under the deterioration of the ruling and the teaching classes, the whole of the nations began to go downhill, and the great Slave States arose - States based on chattel slavery, serf slavery, and wage slavery - on the ruins of these ancient Socialist States. Always with the ruling classes deterioration begins. They have power, and they begin to misuse it. And so came about, not autocracy for the sake of the people, but tyranny for the plundering of the people. And we come now within "historical" times, when to rule did not mean to serve, as it ought to mean. "Let the greatest among you be he that doth serve"; that is the word of one great Teacher, and it is the word which marks the condition for the higher degrees of humanity.

The moment strength is used for the little self, and not for the larger Self, that moment it becomes tyranny and oppression, becomes a means of destruction, and not a pillar of support. And so with the coming of lesser men into the powers that the great men had used, there came the gradual decline of the State, and ignorance began to be a reason for being cheated and oppressed, and betrayed, instead of being, as in the old family idea, a reason for being protected, cherished and guided. The whole spirit of the time changed, and we have all the different phases of individualism that are seen in the more modern States. Individualism began with the rulers and the priests, they who should have been the servants of all, and it passed on, doing a good work along its own line, for it was necessary that the individual should be developed, in order that a permanently nobler State might ultimately grow out of the strife.

It is a short-sighted eye which sees in any great phase of human growth and evolution only evil and not good. Something comes out of every great human experience, however much at first sight it may seem to be revolting; and it was necessary that the individual should develop despite all the war, social and national, that the developing of the individual necessarily meant. And so the changes went forward, and "duty" ceased to be the law of the State, and the claim to "rights" took its place. Inevitably, where the law of duty has perished as a binding force, men are bound to claim their rights and appeal to legal justice. And so the nations came into the phase of imaginary Social Contracts and State arrangements, and all the other fictions on which modern Democracy has gradually been built up - that we were all born free, and that we gave up some of our rights in order to preserve the others, and so on - we all know the whole of it - a fiction, and a fiction is not a good thing on which to base the growth of a civilization. We must found on facts, not on fictions, if we want Society to grow and to be healthy. The great watchword of the Eighteenth Century, that man was born free and is in chains everywhere, is a pure fiction. He was never born free, but is ever born helpless, and dependent for his life in his younger days on the guiding and the nurture of his elders. That is as true of humanity, as it is true of every baby that is born into the world. And because man is thus born helpless, duty needs to be the law of human life and human growth. Only by the recognition of the law of duty can humanity progress towards perfection.

In this growth to Democracy much that we see now seems to be full of menace for the future. For the Democracy into whose hands the power has slipped, is the Democracy brought up under conditions that make it impossible that it should wisely guide a State. How should a number of men, knowing practically very little outside the mine or the forge, or the mill, be able to deal with all the subtler questions on which the prosperity of a nation depends? They can know only what their class wants - relief from the pressure that is crushing them down. And surely they are not to blame if they try to use political power to lift something of the burden under which they, their forefathers, and their children live. They would be less than human, if they did not use it so. But class rule is not better, when it is the class rule of Democracy, than when it is the class rule of the aristocracy. In some senses it is worse because more ignorant, in some senses worse because less refined.

Civilization cannot risk the loss of all that it has won during thousands of years of labour and study, and there is the danger that numbers may swamp brains, that ignorance may swamp knowledge - even if the knowledge is limited - a danger lest a triumphant Democracy should pull down instead of constructing, and sacrifice all that humanity has won, under the mere pressure of suffering, and the bitter need for food and leisure. Now, as long as a man is under that pressure he cannot judge fairly; as long as he is bitterly suffering, he cannot weigh what is necessary, what is possible.

How should Society be re-organized? That it must be re-organized is clear. But how? I suggest - I do not know how far my readers will agree with me - that there is much in these old principles that might form the chart of modern Socialism, that the moral training which should make men and women understand that growing knowledge and power is duty, is one of the most vital lessons for these modern days.

In our upper or middle classes, all who are not engaged in the bitter strife for bread, should carry on a propaganda of duty far more than a propaganda of rights, and should set the example of doing duty; we must try to teach the men and women whose lives are comparatively easy, that the only way in which Society can be re-organized without a catastrophe in which the results of civilization will perish, is that they should take up the rule of self-denial, voluntarily and willingly, which has so long been imposed involuntarily on the poor and the miserable. That seems to me the first lesson that all have to learn who

are not fighting for bread; that no one has the right to live and enjoy save as he gives, whether he gives time, thought, money, training - and that the more he possesses, the more he is bound to give.

Only in that way can we gain time to make economic changes. And these changes will not be made successfully in the storm of revolution, because in revolution the men who come to the top are not the wisest men, but the most exaggerated men; and the man who can promise most is the one who comes to the top, and each one tries to outbid the other, in order to secure his own power, and avoid suspicion from the great masses of the people. The lesson of the French Revolution is a lesson which it is well to learn. Notice the waves of the Revolution as they came on, and notice how every moderate party in turn was swallowed up, and how each extreme party was guillotined by a still more extreme, until the military power put an end to all.

And it is of no use to ignore the lessons of history. Hardest of all for the younger amongst us in this to understand, for they naturally think that everything can be done so quickly, and do not see the difficulties, and do not realize the obstacles that have to be overcome, and the riddles that have to be solved. And we need a preaching of the doctrine of self-sacrifice, not in order to win an individual heaven, for that is not self-sacrifice at all, but only self-seeking; but the self-sacrifice of duty, which says: "Because I have more to give, I must give more." "From every one according to his capacities"; it is the word of Socialism, but it is the word that is forgotten now.

Because idleness has been the prize of success, the masses of the people look on idleness as that for which they ought to strive. None should blame them. They are only following where those who are called "upper classes" have led the way. But till the upper classes learn duty, first of all - noblesse oblige - we cannot expect that the lesson of duty should be learned by those who have naught to give, who have everything to gain by uproar and by tumult. And so I suggest that we should hold up an ideal of a Socialist State in which the wisest should be the rulers; and the claim of the child, of the ignorant, should be the right to be educated, to be trained, to be disciplined, in order that they may be free. The ignorant are never free.

I have sometimes thought of a scheme outside the question of the great ideal, which I believe to be the most inspiring force of all; and without an ideal, clearly planned and definitely approached, we shall never do anything really worth the doing - or rather of certain lines of re-organization which are well worthy of consideration and discussion. Let me put it quite briefly. That a small area should be the unit of administration - a village, a township, any small area that may be named, so long as it is small. Then, that the people in that area should have the right to elect those who are to guide; but only people over a certain age, or with a certain definite experience of life - the "elders" in the old sense of the term. That it should be their right to choose those who immediately should guide their little polity, so that the administration of the small area may be always under the control of the people who have to live in it.

The head of the council of the area should be chosen out of those elected by the people living therein, but chosen by the authority immediately above it. That has not been tried for many thousands of years, but it is a sound system; out of those elected by the people, one should be chosen as the President - or Chairman of the Board, as we may say - by the authority next above the people themselves. But the choice of the higher authority should be limited to those elected by the people.

The whole life of the people as regards agriculture, crafts, amusements, libraries and sanatoriums, should be in the hands of these local councils; so that the life of the unit in each state should be self-

contained to a very great extent. The next area would be the area in which many of these were gathered together into a single organization, say a province.

All the primary councils would advise the Provincial council, and only those would have the right to rule in that larger organization, who had proved themselves good rulers in the small organization below - not fresh from ignorance, but partly trained, would be the rulers of this next greater area, and their chief, again, selected by the authority next above.

A parliament of the nation, which should guide national affairs, would be chosen again only by and from those who had shown themselves efficient in provincial politics. And international affairs I would not give to the ordinary parliament at all, but to the ruler of the State, the Monarch, and to the men old in knowledge and experience, the best of the nation, who should be round him as his council; to the hands of that body only should international politics be trusted. That is a rough sketch, but it may serve as a basis for discussion, to be worked out very much more fully, of course, than I am putting it now.

But the general idea is that each man should have power according to his knowledge and capacity. None should be without some share, but the power that he has should be limited to his knowledge, experience and capacity; and only those should rule the nation who have won their spurs in good administration of national affairs. In this way, we should restore to the State something of the knowledge that it wants, and we should take away from the State the danger of allowing a mass of ignorant electors - who are really fighting to elect a man who will look after their mines, their drains, their local interests, matters they understand - to upset international arrangements, and possibly plunge us into war - or worse, into dishonour. Those are the general principles which might be worked out, and might be applied to modern days. And the key-note is that of my fairy tale: "From every man according to his capacity; to every man according to his needs."

A democratic Socialism, controlled by majority votes, guided by numbers, can never succeed; a truly aristocratic Socialism, controlled by duty, guided by wisdom, is the next step upwards in civilization.