

**COLLECTIVISM AND THE
SOCIALISM OF THE LIBERAL
SCHOOL: A CRITICISM AND
AN EXPOSITION**

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Collectivism and the Socialism of the Liberal School: A Criticism and an Exposition by A. Naquet

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Social science series.

COLLECTIVISM

AND THE

SOCIALISM OF THE LIBERAL SCHOOL

A CRITICISM AND AN EXPOSITION

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P R E F A C E.

THE original title of this book is *Socialisme Collectiviste et Socialisme Libéral*.¹

Though a convinced Socialist myself I confess that M. Naquet's book struck me as a most concise and valuable contribution to the discussion of the social question. I felt that the scientific tone in which M. Naquet attempts the confutation of Collectivism deserves full consideration at the hands of English Socialists and of all those interested in the topics with which the book treats. Hence the appearance of this translation, in making which I have not allowed the commentator to usurp the functions of the translator. My chief aim has been to reproduce the thought of my author, and not to add any meretricious embellishments of my own.

I cannot conclude without expressing my very sincere thanks to Mr. A. Larpent, whose counsel greatly lightened my task, and who kindly compared my translation with the original.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

April, 1891.

¹ Paris: E. Dentu, éditeur. Librairie de la Société des Gens de Lettres, 1890.

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COLLECTIVISM AND THE SOCIALISM OF THE LIBERAL SCHOOL.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Collectivists, through the instrumentality of their different writers, foremost amongst whom Karl Marx deserves to be placed, on account of the vigour, clearness, and precision of his criticism, have indulged in a violent attack upon the existing system of society—an attack which, despite the numerous and fundamental errors with which it abounds, is none the less powerful, and is entitled none the less to a serious examination.

Their doctrine consists quite naturally of two parts—the one critical, and the other organic, embodying a plan of social re-organisation. Concerning this latter scheme the fathers of Collectivism—Lassalle, Marx—are sober in their details. They confine themselves to an impeachment of modern capitalism, and it is only through occasional glimpses that they exhibit to us their ideas on the future of society. It is to their commentators—to Deville, to Schaffle—that one must have recourse in order to acquaint oneself with the ideas of the school as a whole.

Both parts—the criticism and the plan of organisation—lend themselves equally to a scientific refutation, and necessarily so, for the two parts hang together, and the one cannot be false unless the other is likewise false. Let us add, however, that the scheme of reconstruction raises by far the greatest of all the objections.

One of the points on which Collectivist-Socialism is essentially wrong, though the fact is ignored by its devotees—and this, too, in

spite of its constant affirmations of materialism—is that it acts practically as a religion. This position, if quite logical on the part of the Christian Socialists, is absolutely illogical on the part of the Collectivists.

It is clear that if we start from the idea that there exists an immanent justice, and if we believe that, by the working of some universal law, everything must finally result in good, it will be sufficient to demonstrate the existence of evil in order to be justified in concluding that there exists an efficacious remedy.

But when one admits neither immanent justice nor providence, nothing remains to prove that it is possible to remedy the imperfections one discovers in nature ; nothing is left to prove that these imperfections are not inherent in the very nature of things, and are not in accordance with the laws of the universe ; nothing that vouches the conclusion that it is possible to substitute, for the social system the Socialists so righteously denounce, a system which would be better.

The general law of the universe, without doubt, grievously wounds that sentiment of justice which, with the progress of civilisation, has slowly gained possession of the human mind, and which does not seem to correspond to any actual reality outside mankind.

This general law may be summed up in that precept, as terrible as it is fatal,—Eat one another.

Throughout nature, the strong destroy the weak, the great devour the small.

This rule everywhere prevails, even in the mineral kingdom. Place in a glass receptacle a saturated solution of any salt, putting therein a large number of undissolved crystals of the same salt, and taking care that the crystals are of various sizes. Close the receptacle, expose it during several years to the changes of the seasons, and you will discover that, by a mechanical process, the operation of which can easily be explained, the large crystals will have become larger, whilst the small ones will have diminished in volume or entirely disappeared.

A terrible competition is waged in the vegetable world, one

plant stamping out another. The animals devour the plants, and devour each other. Man himself, after ages of cannibalism, still devours the animals, and probably always will devour them. Where, then, can we go to find the principle of the right to live? Assuredly not in nature, since it contains not a trace of such a principle.

Why does such an arrangement of things exist at all?

To kill a sheep in order to eat it violates the idea we form of justice, and overthrows the principles of the right to live—at least, so far as animals are concerned. Yet we cannot give up eating if we want to live at all, and we cannot sustain life except with dead bodies. Our life is bound up with the destruction of thousands of living beings, animals or plants, and, similarly, there is nothing to show that among human aggregations some of the imperfections which distress us are not inevitable.

Man, by this fact alone that he is the superior among beings, raises his mind to conceptions which—since they are absolute—have nowhere any objective reality, and justice might very well be one of these subjective conceptions. It is quite possible that this idea may be one of those which can never step outside the domain of imagination into that of fact. No doubt it has not been demonstrated to be so, but the contrary idea equally lacks demonstration, and the fact that we find it certainly impossible to realise our ideal in many cases, notably in the question of food, leaves the stage clear to those who maintain that the same powerlessness limits equally our efforts in many other matters.

It is not enough, then, for the Collectivists to establish that the society existing to-day is bad. It would, moreover, be necessary for them to prove that it is possible to establish a better society on the ruins of the old, and that this new society would be less charged with abuses and injustice than that which it would have superseded.

If they cannot prove that, all their criticisms, for that very reason, become mere declamation, and remain a dead letter.

It is incumbent, therefore, upon those who do not wish to pronounce an inconsiderate opinion, not only to weigh the objections