Why the Church Opposes Socialism

Showing the Material Basis of Society and Its Influence on the American Church

BY

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Editor Appeal to Reason

ALSO

Socialism, Labor and Religion
BY REV. W. M. BALCH

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THE CHANGING ORDER

The America we know today is not the America which our grandfathers knew. Our social system, our political ideas, our religious beliefs, are changed. Apparently these changes have been made slowly, and, to most of us, imperceptibly. Yet as a matter of fact the changes made in our industrial system have been rapid, causing in turn a rapid remaking of our religious, civil and political structures. We pay scanty heed to these varying forms, and carry with us an indefinite idea that things have always been as they are today and will remain unchanged. A moment's serious reflection will convince you that this is untrue. Changes are constantly being made—otherwise progress would cease. The railroad, the electric car, the arc light, the telephone, the telegraph, the ocean liner, are all inventions, each of which mark a complete industrial revolution. All of them have been perfected within the memory of many who are today actively engaged in the fierce struggle for existence.

Religions, morals, ethics, change with the change of industrial systems. Says Loria: "As the reigning morality is always the product of existing economic conditions, the disintegration of any established economic system necessarily involves the dissolution of its corresponding system of ethics."

No country in the world furnishes so striking an illustration of the correctness of this theory as does our own. Our churches no longer preach that slavery is a "moral institution," as they did in 1836. Our legislators no longer enact fugitive slave laws. Our learned professors no longer point with pride to the "noble institution of chattel slavery," and profound axioms of political economy based thereon. The economic conditions which made these views and laws necessary and possible have passed away.

The purpose of the following article is to direct the reader's attention to these changes and to show how closely the church follows the changing economic structure.
Why the Church Opposes Socialism

In every historical epoch the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up and from which alone can be explained the political and intellectual history of that epoch.—Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.

THE MATERIAL BASIS OF SOCIETY.

I wish to emphasize this statement, so I will repeat it again in a slightly different form: In every historical epoch the prevailing method of producing food and clothes and the necessaries of man's physical existence form the basis upon which is built the social, political and intellectual structure of that particular epoch.

When Karl Marx and Frederick Engels put forth this statement, as embodying the essential feature of their discovery of the underlying forces of the movement of society, they laid down the gage of battle around which the forces of radicalism and progress have rallied for over a half century. To disprove the historical truth of this proposition means that you have captured the Socialist's strongest position. Shake the accuracy of this thesis and you have shattered the philosophy of the scientific Socialist.

Up to this time the opponents of Socialism have been unable to disprove its accuracy, while, on the other hand, history abounds with illustrations demonstrating its truth.

The history of our own country furnishes a wealth of material proving that the theory of the materialistic conception of history is correct—and I propose to present for your consideration a few of the striking illustrations which show that in the evolution of the American people from the primitive life of the early colonists to our modern complex civilization the entire social, political, intellectual and reli-
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gious structure of the nation conformed to the methods of producing the material necessities of life.

ITS INFLUENCE ON THE AMERICAN CHURCH.

I propose to discuss particularly the influence which this economic base of society has had upon the religious institutions and thought of America, and to point out how they have constantly changed to suit the varying views and economic needs of the dominant class. In pre-revolutionary times the church supported the divine right of kings and feudal lords to rule and tax the people; during antebellum days the church, with not a single exception, supported and fought for the "peculiar institution" of slavery, which gave one class of men the right and power to take from another and larger class of men all that the latter produced, save barely enough to support a physical existence; and today the church supports this same system of exploitation in a slightly altered form.1

No nation in the world furnishes so strong a proof of the materialistic basis of history as does our own. No country in any epoch of its existence ever furnished so striking an example of the complete change in social, political and religious thought as our own when the change was made from the slave method of production to that of the wage system.

Previous civilizations had required centuries to evolve from the slave method of producing food and clothes to the modern method, under which the master simply buys so

1. It amounts in effect to this, whether the operatives of a country shall be bought and sold, and themselves become property, as in this state; or whether they shall be hirelings, and their labor only become property, as in some other states.—Charleston Baptist Association memorial to legislature in 1835.

That as to this matter, it was of no consequence by what name you call your people, whether by that of free men or slaves. That in some countries the laboring poor men were called free men; in others they were called slaves; but the difference was imaginary only. What matters it whether a landlord employing ten laborers on his farm gives them annually as much as will buy the necessaries of life, or gives them those necessaries at short hand?—John Adams, 1776, from "Lost Principles of sectional Equilibrium," by Barbarossa, 1860, p. 39,
OPPOSES SOCIALISM.

many hours, days or months of the labor time of the worker, instead of buying the whole time of the worker as during the slave period. It was a tortuous journey—this journey up through ancient slavery, feudalism and capitalism. It required centuries upon centuries—and the institutions of previous epochs had faded into the forgotten past before the new had been fairly established.

SOCIAL PROGRESS IN AMERICA.

Not so in America. These various stages, from the time when men equipped with crude implements wrested from the forest and stream the necessities for their existence, to this age of machinery, pass in rapid succession. Into the virgin wilderness of America, teeming with natural resources, came Europeans, fresh from the best civilizations of the old world, but which, compared to ours of today, fade into insignificance. They knew nothing of industry as we know it today. They knew nothing of electricity—nothing of steam and little of machinery. Their knowledge of navigation was limited and crude. Hence it should excite no wonder on our part that when they reached the new and unknown land of America they adopted the crude methods of primitive man. For protection against the savage they gathered together in communities, and we find on the new continent the primitive communism of centuries previous practiced over again. And this was done from a purely economic reason—that of protection. This gave way later on, as it did in older civilizations, to the individualistic method. After the common danger from savages had passed and rugged Nature had been brought into subjection, our American colonists commenced over again the struggle with man—and finally class against class.

THE DEMAND FOR SLAVES.

After the first period of discovery and development individual man depended upon his own strength, and with his own hands wrested from nature the simple food and other necessities to maintain life. Later on, as the colonist brought more land under his subjection, he discovered that he needed more laborers. The planter could no longer alone look after
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his plantation. Hands must be secured. The Indian would not work—civilization had nothing which it could offer the savage in exchange for his wild, care-free life. To bind himself even for a day to any other man to be his servant was distasteful and disagreeable to the man of the forest and stream, who asked no other's consent for the privilege of helping himself to the bounties of nature.

A few weeks ago I visited Manhattan Beach, near New York. For a moment I shut out from sight and sound the busy, noisy whirr of the metropolis. I forgot that I was merely a cog in this mad whirl we call civilization. "I looked out over the wide expanse of waves, lazily lapping the beach, and far away, out beyond, lay the great sea, apparently motionless under the steel blue light of the moon. The sky seemed to be stooping lower and ever lower toward the sea in its efforts to understand the murmur of the ceaseless waves." And to the west rose the Palisades, and in imagination I could see them in their pristine glory, untouched by the beauty-destroying hand of man. To the north stretched the waters of the Hudson, pulsating with the rise and rhythmic fall of the tide. I could feel within me the call of the wild. Again a primitive man, I looked over the vast estate and said: "It is mine." I did not possess it to the exclusion of others. There was plenty for me and my companions. And I could begin to understand why the red man fought to retain his happy hunting grounds and why he resisted the galling chains of civilization. And then I went back to Hell, and wandered through the seething, myriad-lighted streets of the metropolis of the New World.

THE INDENTURED SERVANT.

But our colonist fathers were blind to the beauties around them—they were pressed by the galling taxes of European royalty and they were engaged in the struggle for existence. They looked across the sea and asked for bond servants. Bond servants were shipped to the colonists. These bond servants were men who had failed to pay their debts—debts contracted in the fierce struggle to meet the exactions of the kings and the feudal lords of the old world, and for this failure they were thrown into prison. For a time this supply of cheap labor
relieved the distress of the planters. But so soon as these bond
servants had served their time they in turn became land-owners.
An ax, a spade and a gun were all the implements needed to
become an independent land-owner. Land was free in those
days—there was none to dispute possession but the naked savage.
As the white man, with his strange weapons of warfare, ex-
tended his frontier the Indian moved ever westward. And so it
came about, prompted by economic necessity, that the planters
and colonists, many of whom had been serfs and bond ser-
vants in the mother country, found it expedient to look about
for labor that did not aspire to be free—that once enslaved
would stay enslaved—satisfied with the position in life which
God in His "infinite wisdom had placed him." You see, the
planters needed laborers—economic necessity—and they told
the negroes, and they instructed the ministers to tell them
also, that God had placed them in this position for their own
good and for their soul's salvation. They must stay or suffer
the eternal damnation of their souls for rebelling against God's
divine institution.

THE AFRICAN SLAVE.

Enterprising slave traders, under the patronage of the
kings of England, Spain and Portugal, visited the shores of
Africa, and great numbers of black men and women were kid-
naped and brought to the United States. It should be observed
that in the early days of the slave trade, during the seventeenth
century, the colonists were loth to accept these new laborers.
The necessity had not yet risen where they needed slaves, and
it was not until the latter part of the eighteenth and the early
part of the nineteenth centuries that chattel slavery was actu-
ally profitable to the planters of America.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHURCH.

With this short resume of the industrial situation in the
United States up to the time of the Revolution, we will pass
on to a consideration of the attitude of the church to this
institution of slavery. *Did the church oppose it? Did the
church support it? It did both—and, strange as it may seem
to us at this time, it opposed it because it was wrong—and
it went to the scriptures to support its position; it supported
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and defended it because it was right—for it was a divine institution inaugurated by God himself—and it (the church) went to the scriptures to prove this position.

Now it is for the purpose of briefly inquiring into the causes which led to this conflicting position on the part of the churches of the United States that we have opened this discussion, and in developing these causes I expect to prove conclusively that the church was influenced by the prevailing economic mode of producing the material things of life—thus strengthening, by illustrations from the history of our own nation, Marx's statement quoted at the beginning. In developing this thought I will use only historical material which any one may obtain. For months I delved into the musty tomes of ante-bellum times, yellow with age and dusty from long disuse, in the Congressional library at Washington. It seems that we have been trying to live down the past by forgetting it. We would fain cover from the light this black chapter in the history of the American church. I propose to hold up to your view the grinning skeleton of the past, not out of any spirit of maliciousness, but with the same object in view as the surgeon has when he probes a delicate physical wound.

THE METHODIST CHURCH.

I shall trace more particularly the course of the Methodist Episcopal church in its attitude towards slavery—because I feel more at home in the Methodist church; and, again, the history of the Methodist church is but the exact duplicate of that of all other American churches, without a single notable exception.

As far back as the revolutionary war my people were Methodists. I well remember my great-grandfather. As a boy of six I led him by the hand over the hills and through the valleys of the old Ohio homestead. He was a Methodist—one of the first—and his home was always the meeting place of the early bishops of that church, as they traveled from the east to the then just developing west. And so I feel I am repeating family history when I read the following resolution, passed by the general conference of the Methodist church in 1780, at about which time this great-
OPPOSES SOCIALISM.

grandfather of mine put in his appearance to bless a family of poor, but devout, Methodists:

The conference acknowledges that slavery is contrary to the laws of God, man and nature, and hurtful to society; contrary to the dictates of conscience and true religion, and doing what we would not that others would do to us.

Remember, at this time the church was composed of a mere handful of believers—most of them fresh from England—poor in this world's goods. Some of them had but recently escaped from slavery as bond servants, and all of them were threatened with the prospect of falling into the hands of the civil authorities by reason of their failure or inability to meet their obligations. Hence, you can readily understand why slavery, in any of its hideous forms, appeared to them as a crime against society.

REFUSED TO ADMIT SLAVE OWNERS TO LORD'S SUPPER.

In 1784 the church was fully organized and this sentiment was reiterated. A resolution was passed without a dissenting voice proscribing slave owners from membership, and refusing to admit them to the Lord's supper.

In 1785 the conference resolved that "we hold in the deepest abhorrence the practice of slavery, and shall not cease to seek its destruction by all wise and prudent means."

Again, in 1801, the conference declared "that we are more than ever convinced of the great evil of African slavery, which still exists in the United States."

A RADICAL CHANGE IN ITS ATTITUDE.

Now comes to us the startling part of the program of the Methodist Episcopal church. A complete summersault was turned between the years 1801 and 1836.

From a little pamphlet published in 1842, written by

1. One-half of the community was totally bankrupt, the other half plunged in the depths of poverty.—McMaster's "History of the People of the United States."

1. 1784. Hard by the Dutch church (in New York) stood a smaller and less pretentious chapel, on whose worshippers Episcopalians and Dissenters alike looked down with horror not unmixed with contempt. The building had been put up some sixteen years before. Yet the congregation was not numerous, and was made up chiefly of shopkeepers and negroes, for the Methodists were still a new sect.—McMaster's "History of the People of the United States."
James Birney, I quote the following, which shows clearly and unmistakably, backed by the conference records of that church, the attitude maintained by official Methodism. Mr. Birney says:

In 1836 the General Conference of the Methodist church met in May, in Cincinnati, a town of 46,000 inhabitants and the metropolis of the free state of Ohio. An anti-slavery society had been formed there a year or two before. A meeting of the society was appointed for the evening of the 10th of May, to which the abolitionists attending the conference were invited. (The Rev. Mr. Lovejoy, who was afterward slain by a mob in defending his press at Alton, Ill., was present at the meeting.) Of those who attended, two made remarks suitable to the occasion. On the 12th of May Rev. S. G. Roszell presented in the conference the following preamble and resolutions:

"Whereas, Great excitement has pervaded the country on the subject of modern abolitionism, which is reported to have been increased in this city recently by the unjustifiable conduct of two members of the general conference lecturing upon and in favor of that agitating topic; and,

"Whereas, Such a course on the part of any of its members is calculated to bring upon this body the suspicion and distrust of the community and misrepresent its sentiments in regard to the point at issue; and,

"Whereas, In this aspect of the case, a due regard for its own character, as well as a just concern for the interests of the church confided to its care, demand a full, decided and unequivocal expression of the views of the general conference in the premises; therefore,

"Be it resolved, by the delegates of the annual conference, That they disapprove, in the most unqualified sense, the conduct of the two members of the general conference who are reported to have lectured in this city upon and in favor of modern abolitionism.

"Resolved, by the delegates of the annual conference, That they are decidedly opposed to modern abolitionism, and wholly disclaim any right, wish or intention to interfere in the civil and political relation between master and slave, as it exists in the slave-holding states of this union."

DENOUNCED MEN WHOM THEY HONOR.

The resolutions were adopted by a vote of 122 to 11! And this in a free state, too, and by Methodists, who, before and since, have posed as the champions of freedom and of the oppressed! Could a more complete summersault be conceived? Can you imagine a more disgusting and humiliating position for the great Methodist church?—and only eleven protesting voices! Think of it for a moment, my Methodist brothers. Are you proud of your church history? And do you know what your brothers in Christ—your grandfather and my grandfather—called the Rev. Lovejoy and his abolition associates? They
called them infidels, and they tarred and feathered them, and they ostracized them, and they murdered them. And now what do you do? YOU MAKE HEROES OF THEM!

But why this sudden and complete right-about-face? Now listen, for here follows the nub of the whole proposition; and if what I say is wrong—if my conclusions are wrong, then must the Socialist deny the theory of "economic determinism," and admit that Marx was wrong when he said: "In every historical epoch the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch."

ECONOMIC CAUSES AT WORK.

And so you do not have to go far to discover the cause of this two-faced attitude of the great Methodist church, with its, at that time, 700,000 members. The slave system of production was now the economic method of production. It was the base of society. The black slaves were the mudsills. They dug the wealth from mother earth, and it was taken by the master. The dominant thought of this nation at that time was the thought arising from this system. The majority of the supporters of the Methodist church were slave-owners. Can you not see that these preachers of the gospel of the lowly Nazarene were influenced by economic and financial considerations? Was there any other cause?

Now listen to this, you people who deny that men are influenced in their views by their economic environment and who deny that our institutions are founded upon and influenced by the base material means of producing the food and clothes which we must have to maintain a physical existence:

CONVICTED BY METHODIST TESTIMONY.

During the general conference of this same Methodist church, held in 1840—four years after the one just referred to—Rev. Capers, D. D., read from the reports of the 1780, 1784 and 1785 conferences and attempted to show, because of the smallness of the church and the little connection it had
with slavery in 1780, that it adopted the language which was precisely consistent with its circumstances, but when the church had extended further and become more entangled with slavery, there was a corresponding faltering in the language of the church against it. "But in 1800 the church fell into a great error on this subject," continues the Rev. Mr. Capers, D. D. "The conference authorized addresses to the legislatures and agents to be circulated by all ministers, and instructed them to continue those measures from year to year until slavery was abolished. He had no doubt that the men who were engaged in this work were sincere and pious, but they soon perceived "it was a great error and abandoned it." . . . We know our work," says Rev. Capers, "it is to preach and pray for the slaves."

Yes, the gentlemen knew their work, and they obeyed their masters—the men who put up the salaries and built the churches. And in exchange for this the preachers were to preach and pray for the slaves, to make them contented with their lot, and make them an easier prey for the masters of the Lash. What do you think of the record? And do you wonder that there was a conflict between the abolitionist and the church?

In 1862 Mr. E. W. Reynolds, in his book, "The True Story of the Barons of the South," said:

The story of the subsequent decline of this righteous sentiment in the church—the story of its toleration of slave holding, of its acquiescence in all the practices it involves, of its final approbation of the system—and its open assaults upon the few surviving sons of liberty—will comprise, in coming time, the most dishonorable chapter in our annals, and will rank among the most dubious records of Christian history.

You now begin to understand something of what the Socialist means when he speaks of "economic determinism," do you not? Individuals here and there may be swayed by high ideals and a lofty conception of duty—history records in every age some personage of this kind—but the actions of a class, or of a group, or of a nation, can only be determined and understood by understanding the methods by which this particular class or group secure their living. Strange as it may seem, this problem of securing food and clothes has been the
great human problem since the time man emerged from savagery to the present—and it will continue to be until we get sane and wake up to the possibilities within our grasp.

ATTEMPTS TO JUSTIFY ITS COURSE.

It must not be thought that the church did not attempt to justify this change in its position. It sought for ointment for its ruffled conscience. It went to the Bible and there found what it wanted—it found justification for its support of the institution of slavery, just as forty years before it had gone to the Bible to find justification for its attack on slavery. Listen to this: In the Church Advocate and Journal, the official organ of the Methodist church, dated October 20th, 1807, the Rev. Elijah Hedding, D. D., one of the six Methodist bishops, writes:

The right to hold a slave is founded on this rule. “Therefore, all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them,” for this is the law and the prophets.

You remember in the quotation I made from the conference minutes of 1785, twenty-two years previously, this Golden Rule was interpreted to mean exactly the opposite to what given by this bishop. And, remember, the man or woman who dared dispute this interpretation of the scriptures was considered little better than a heretic.

Here is another: Rev. E. D. Simm, professor in Randolph-Macon college of Virginia, a Methodist institution, says:

These extracts from Holy Writ unequivocally assert the right of property in slaves, together with the usual incidents to that right. The right to buy and sell is clearly stated. Upon the whole, then, whether we consult the Jewish policy, instituted by God himself, or the uniform opinion and practice of mankind in all ages, or the injunctions of the New Testament and the moral law, we are brought to the conclusion that slavery is not immoral. Having established the point that the first African slaves were legally brought into bondage, the right to detain their children in bondage follows as an indispensable consequence. Thus we see that the slavery which exists in America was founded in right.

Shades of Aristotle! Was there ever such logic! And by a college professor with “D. D.” after his name and “reverend” before it! And you wonder why there was a con-
flict between the abolitionist and his church! Was this a case of "economic determinism?"

Out of the mass of drivel, such as I have quoted, I take one or two more passages. Chancellor Harper, one of the great lights of ante-bellum days, is responsible for this:

Man is born to subjection. Not only during infancy is he dependent, and under the control of others; at all ages it is very bias of his nature that the strong and the wise should control the weak and the ignorant. So it has been since the days of Nimrod. The existence of some form of slavery in all ages and in all countries is proof enough of this. He is born to subjection as he is born to sin and ignorance.

*De Bow's Review*, the most influential magazine of the south, in its November issue, 1857, said:

We must teach that slavery is necessary in all societies—as well to protect, as to govern the weak, poor and ignorant. We should show that slave society, which is a series of subordinations, is consistent with Christian morality. . . . Within the precincts of the family, including slaves, the Golden Rule is a practical and wise guide of conduct. But in a free society, where selfishness, rivalry and competition are necessary to success, and almost to existence, this rule cannot be adopted in practice. . . . We of the south can build up an ethical code on the morality of the Bible, because human interests with us do not generally clash, but coincide. Without the family circle, it is true, competition and clashing interests exist, and the little competition that is left is among the rich and the skillful and serves to keep society progressive. It is enough that slavery will relieve common laborers of the evils of competition and the exactions and skill of capital. . . . To protect the weak we must enslave them, and this slavery must be either political and legal or social.

**CHRISTIAN SLAVERY (?)**

In 1860, amid the crash and rumble of the decaying system of chattel slavery, the Rev. Dr. Armstrong, in his "Christian Doctrine of Slavery," said:

It may be that Christian slavery is God's solution of the problem about which the wisest statesmen of Europe confess themselves at fault.

How specious—how glaringly false—appears this line of argument to you today! *Christian slavery*! And yet we should remember that your grandfather and my grandfather—and some of our fathers as well—believed these things, and they joined mobs to do violence to the "infidel dogs" who dared question the holy scriptures, as interpreted by these good men.
But it may be objected that these were the expressions of private individuals and that the church was not bound by them, nor committed to this view of the situation. Very well, we will dig a little further and see what the church itself, through its conferences, synods and associations, had to say. *By the way, it should be observed in passing that church conferences, synods, associations, etc., take no notice whatever of the question of chattel slavery today—and have not since 1865. Why? Because the economic form of production—the method of producing food and clothes—has changed from chattel slavery to the wage system. The church follows this form, and upon this new base a new system of ethics, a new code of morals, has been built. Chattel slavery being abolished—it ceased to be a system which needed defense and support, and so the church neglected to resolve *that it was not a moral evil—that it had existed from time immemorial—that it was instituted by God himself—and other arguments of that sort which our forefathers believed. Absurd as they appear now to us, we today would believe them had it not been discovered that chattel slavery is a losing game and that there is a better way to exploit labor.*

**MORE PROFITABLE TO BUY LABOR POWER THAN TO OWN THE LABORERS**

But so long as chattel slavery was the form of economic production—so long as deacons, elders, preachers and bishops were slave owners—it held the center of the stage. It is true it was ignored for a time, and would have been ignored to this day by these wise interpreters of the scriptures had it not been for the opposition developed by the rising capitalist class, who had discovered that it was more profitable to buy labor by the day than to buy it for a lifetime, and then we find these well-groomed parasites rushing to the rescue and handing out the foolish arguments quoted above.

And this change was made for purely economic (financial) reasons—and I challenge any one to produce any evidence showing that there was any other cause. I don't believe any one will contend that these churchmen in 1780 had a revelation from God which told them slavery was wrong—and then in 1836 another revelation from God prov-
ing conclusively that it was right. Where else will you go but to the economic interests of the slave owners for the cause of the church’s attitude?

*The church simply built its religious tenets upon, and to conform with, the economic mode of production.* And if any further proof is needed to clearly show this, here it is:

**CONFERENCE RESOLUTIONS SUPPORTING SLAVERY.**

The Georgia annual conference resolved unanimously that—

Whereas, There is a clause in the discipline of our church which states that we are as much as ever convinced of the great evil of slavery; and,

Whereas, The said clause has been perverted by some and used in such a manner as to produce the impression that the Methodist Episcopal church believed slavery to be a moral evil; therefore,

Be it resolved, That it is the sense of the Georgia annual conference that slavery, as it exists in the United States, is a moral evil; and,

Resolved, That we view slavery as a civil and domestic institution, and one with which, as ministers of Christ, we have nothing to do, further than to ameliorate the condition of the slave by endeavoring to impart to him and his master the benign influence of Christ and aiding both on their way to heaven.

And so on with other arguments, which, to us, appear to be absurdities. The church was always willing to promise the slave a place in heaven, provided he would be docile and work willingly and faithfully for the master who supported the church.

**AGAIN CHANGES ITS POSITION.**

In 1844 the Methodist church divided upon the question of slavery. The northern wing shifted its ground to accord with the views held by the northern capitalist class—that slavery, being unprofitable, was, therefore, morally wrong. On the other hand, the southern wing held to its opinion that slavery, being profitable, was, therefore, not morally wrong, until the system was finally abolished by the new economic order which was, at that time in America, beginning to demonstrate that chattel slavery was much less profitable than the wage system. The history of the Methodist church at this point is the history of other American churches.

**THE BAPTIST CHURCH.**

Now it must not be assumed that the Methodist church was alone in its defense of slavery—nor that it was the only
church organization influenced by its economic environment. Listen to this address, issued by the Charleston Baptist Association in 1835:

The undersigned would further represent that the said association does not consider that the holy scriptures have made the fact of slavery a question of morals at all. The divine author of our holy religion, in particular, found slavery a part of the existing institutions of society; with which, if not sinful, it was not his design to intermeddle, but to leave them entirely to the control of men. Adopting this, therefore, as one of the allowed arrangements of society, he made it the province of his religion only to prescribe the reciprocal duties of the relations. The question, we believe, is purely one of political economy. It amounts, in effect to this, whether the operatives of a country shall be bought and sold, and themselves become property, as in this state; or whether they shall be hirings, and their labor only become property, as in some other states. In other words, whether the employers may buy the whole time of laborers at once of those who have a right to dispose of it, with a permanent relation of protection and care over them, or whether he shall be restricted to buy it in certain portions only, subject to their control, and with no such permanent relation of care and protection. The right of masters to dispose of the time of their slaves has been distinctly recognized by the creator of all things, who is surely at liberty to vest the right of property over any object whomsoever He pleases. That the lawful possessor should retain this right at will is no more against the laws of good morals than that he should retain the personal endowments with which his creator has blessed him, or the money and lands inherited from his ancestors, or acquired by his industry. And neither society, nor individuals have any more authority to demand a relinquishment, without an equivalent, in the one case than in the other.

You will readily see that the Baptist preacher who drew up this memorial had studied the labor question. Note: The labor problem amounts in effect to this: "Whether the operatives of a country shall be bought and sold, and themselves become property, as before the war, or whether they shall become hirings and their labor only become property," as it is today!

COMMUNITY OF WOMEN ESTABLISHED BY CHURCH.

Probably the most glaring example of the code of morals of the church being charged to suit economic conditions and to conform to the existing method of production is given by this same Baptist church. Here it is, and, in order to assure you that no mistake has been made, I refer you to
the records of the Savannah River Baptist Church Association of Ministers, held in 1835. This was the question under discussion:

"Whether, in case of voluntary separation of such character as to preclude all prospect of future intercourse, the parties ought to be allowed to marry again?"

This is the answer:

That such separation among persons situated as our slaves are is civilly a separation by death, and they believe in the sight of God it would be so viewed. To forbid second marriage in such cases would be to expose the parties, not only to stronger hardships and stronger temptations, but to church censure for acting in obedience to their masters, who cannot be expected to acquiesce in a regulation at variance with justice to the slaves and to the spirit of that command which regulates marriage among Christians. The slaves are not free agents, and dissolution by death is not more entirely without their consent, and beyond their control, than by such a separation.

Commenting upon this same peculiar situation, Rhodes' History of the United States, page 317, says:

The law in none of the states recognized slave marriages; in all of them the Roman principle, that the child followed the condition of the mother, was the recognized rule. Except in Louisiana, there was no law to prevent the violent separation of husbands from wives, or children from parents. The church conformed its practice to the law. The question was put to the Savannah River Baptist association whether in the case that slaves were separated they should be allowed to marry again. The answer was in the affirmative, because the separation was civilly equivalent to death, and the ministers believed "that in the sight of God it would be so viewed." It would not be right, therefore, to forbid second marriages. It was proper that the slaves should act in obedience to their masters and raise up for them progeny.

And, mind you, the churches—the Methodist, the Presbyterian, the Baptist, the Christian, and the balance of them—solemnly resolved in their associations and their synods and their conferences that these things were morally right and sanctioned by God.

Do you wonder there was a conflict between the church and the abolitionists?

THE CHURCH ALWAYS SUPPORTS THE DOMINANT CLASS.

See how quickly the church comes to the rescue of the dominant class and protects its financial interests? Adultery, bigamy and prostitution cease to be sins, because, to
enforce this moral code upon these black members of the church would be to interfere seriously with the master’s bank account—and the churches were supported with money obtained from the sale of the children of these black human chattels. Today your church recognizes these same black slaves as men and women with souls as white as your own—as children of the same God and heirs to the same heaven.

And this acrobatic performance of the church—your church—can only be understood by understanding the economic base of that particular epoch in the history of the American nation.

To illustrate: Would it be possible for future generations to read this history of the American church—to note its position in 1780, its position in 1836, its position in 1900; to comprehend the contradictions of the moral code—and understand why these changes were made without uncovering the economic base of society during the various stages? Would not our children think God was a woefully weak and uncertain being, changeable as the wind? Can you not see that men interpret God’s word to suit the particular epoch in which they live? They did it in pre-revolutionary times—and God said, “bow in meek submission to kings and feudal lords.” They did it in ante-bellum days and said slavery was no moral wrong. They do it today and say wage-slavery is right.

Mind you, I am not saying that the Bible or God really stands for these things. I am only asserting that the dominant class makes the religious systems of the world, and in making them it is influenced by the prevailing economic mode of production—the manner in which the material things of life are produced.

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

I must not pass this point without giving you a few quotations showing the attitude of the Presbyterian church, the Episcopal church and the Christian church. My friends of these denominations doubtless would feel aggrieved if I slighted them.

The early history of the Presbyterian church was much like that of the Methodist church. In 1793 it declared
slavery was a crime and quoted from the Bible showing that the perpetrators exposed themselves to capital punishment. Then it got tangled up with the real slaves, and on closer inspection the chains did not look so galling.

And my! what a change in 1835. Mr. Stewart, of Illinois, a ruling elder, in an impassioned speech calling upon the general assembly to take a decided stand against the iniquity, said this:

In this church a man may take a free-born child, force it away from its parents to whom God gave it in charge, saying, "Bring it up for me," and sell it as a beast, or hold it in perpetual bondage.

And, horrors! according to this same gentleman, "Elders, ministers and doctors of divinity, with both hands, are engaged in the practice."

The assembly took no notice of the speech, but "Resolved, That slavery is recognized in both the Old and the New Testaments, and is not condemned by the authority of God; Resolved, That the assembly have no authority to assume or exercise jurisdiction in regard to the existence of slavery." As time was limited the whole matter was indefinitely postponed. And while human beings were being dragged through the country manacled, while young women were being outraged and mothers separated from their children, the Presbyterian ministers calmly adjourned and wended their way back to their flocks.

Do you wonder at the conflict between the abolitionists and the church? I do not.

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

Now, then, here comes our Episcopal friends. I doubt if any of them in America will sanction this sentiment; but not many years ago, shaping its moral code to conform to the then existing system of economic production, the Episcopal church supported a system which was shattered only at the expense of countless lives and millions of wealth. Here are the words of John Jay, Esq., of New York, himself an Episcopalian:

Alas, for the expectation that she would conform to the spirit of her ancient mother. She has not merely remained a mute and careless spectator of this great conflict of truth and justice with hypocrisy and cruelty, but her very priests and deacons may be seen ministering at the altar of
OPPOSES SOCIALISM.

slavery, offering their talents and influence at its unholy shrine, and openly repeating the awful blasphemy that the precepts of our Savior sanction the system of African slavery. Her northern (free state) clergy, with rare exceptions, whatever they may feel upon this subject, rebuke it neither in public nor private; and her periodicals, far from advancing the progress of abolition, at times oppose our societies, defending slavery as not incompatible with Christianity.

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

What was the attitude of the Christian church, meaning that branch known as the Disciples of Christ? Surely here we will find a correct interpretation of the scripture, as we are told emphatically that this denomination takes the Bible, and the Bible only, as its sole authority. Other denominations may err in their interpretation of the scriptures, but the Christian church never. I believe all my friends of this denomination will recognize in the Rev. Alexander Campbell a man fully capable of interpreting the scriptures—at least his ability and soundness would not have been called in question fifty years ago. This is what he says in the Millennial Harbinger, the official organ of the Disciples:

Is the simple relation of master and slave necessarily and essentially immoral and un-Christian, as that, for example, of the adulterer and adulteress? We are clearly and satisfactorily commanded it is not. It would be in our most calm and deliberate judgment a sin against every dispensation of religion—Patriarchial, Jewish and Christian—to suppose that the relationship of master and slave was, in its very nature and being, a sin against God and man. There is not one verse in the Bible inhibiting slavery, but many regulating it. It is not, then, we conclude, immoral. This discipline of the church is the only discipline under which Christian slaves can be placed by Christian masters. If they will not faithfully serve their Christian masters, who partake of the benefit of their labors, then are they, after proper instruction and admonition, to be separated from the church, and to be put under whatever discipline a Christian master, under existing laws of the state, may inflict. To preserve unity of spirit among the Christians of the south and the north is a very grand object, and for that purpose I am endeavoring to show that the New Testament does not authorize any interference or legislation upon the relation of master and slave, nor does it, either in letter or spirit, authorize Christians to make it a term of communion.

INFLUENCED BY HIS ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT.

I can hear my good neighbor exclaim that this was written a long time ago—that the Rev. Campbell lived in a different age—in a different atmosphere—that his interpre-
tation of the scriptures was colored by his environment, etc., and that the Christian church of today does not stand for the views of even so eminent a Christian divine as the Rev. Mr. Campbell.

That is exactly what I am trying to impress upon your mind. Rev. Campbell interpreted the scriptures to conform to the views of the men who supported his church. The majority of them were dominated by the slave-holding element—hence Alexander Campbell, following the lead of the other churches, and not to be outdone by them in bidding for the support of the slave-owners, read into the scriptures a meaning which the earlier churches in America did not find there, and which his church does not find today.

Was the gentleman influenced by his economic environment? I leave it for you to decide.

TREATMENT ACCORDED THE DISSENTERS.

Men who opposed these views of the church were called infidels, anarchists. They were mobbed—and murdered.

"Amos Dresser was a young theological student at Lane Seminary, near Cincinnati. In his vacation, during August, 1835," says Mr. Birney, in his book printed in 1842, "he undertook to sell Bibles in the State of Tennessee, with a view to raise means to further continue his studies. Whilst there he fell under the suspicion of being an abolitionist, was arrested by the vigilance committee while attending a religious meeting in Nashville, the capital of Tennessee, and, after an afternoon and an evening's inquisition, condemned to receive twenty lashes on his naked body. The sentence was executed on him between eleven and twelve o'clock at night, in the presence of most of the committee and an infuriated and blasphemying mob. The vigilance committee consisted of sixty persons. Of these, twenty were church members; one a religious teacher, another an elder, who, but a few days before, in the Presbyterian church, handed Mr. Dresser the bread and wine of communion of the Lord's Supper."

Mr. Dresser was suspected of being in favor of the establishment of a new economic system, and the church, even after administering the communion cup to him as a brother
in Christ, led the mob which brutally beat him. You see its economic interests were at stake. Can you account for the outrage on any other ground? Was it for selling Bibles or being a Presbyterian that he was mobbed? No, I tell you it was because he wanted to change the economic base of society, and in doing this he ran counter to the interests of the dominant class—the slave masters—who controlled the church—and the church came valiantly to the rescue of the threatened interests.

I could go on quoting incidents of this kind—incidents that are not recorded in your modern histories, but which will be found on file in the Congressional Library at Washington. I will not weary you further. Doubtless some of you are wondering what all this has to do with Socialism and the church. I wished first to convict the church of being wrong—judged by our standards today—and then I wished to make clear why it took this wrong position.

THE SOCIALIST AND THE CHURCH.

Today the Socialists stand for the complete overthrow of the wage system, which our Baptist minister in 1835 told you was a difference in 'degree only from that of chattel slavery. Under chattel slavery the master owned the body of the slave—and took what he produced. Today the capitalist owns the machine—the mines, the factories, the railroads and the greater share of the land. The worker can produce only on his terms, and his terms are the entire product save enough to live upon. These were the terms of the slave owner—only he was more generous. He provided shelter and food and medical care when the worker had nothing to do or was sick. The slave had decidedly the best of it.

The Socialist says that the worker is entitled to the full social value of his labor—and that this can only be accomplished by the collective ownership of the machines of production, eliminating the private capitalist entirely, as we have done with our school system and our public road system. And partially by our public postoffice system.

The church today supports the wage system—why? For the same reason that the church supported the chattel slave system. The church draws its support from the Rockefellers,
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the Morgans, the Carnegies, the Depews, the McCurdy’s, the Burtons, the Mitchells, the Clarks, and all the little capitalists who hope some day to be big capitalists. Their economic interests are at stake—they are afraid they will lose the support needed to maintain their institutions. And so they either silently ignore it or openly espouse it. I am speaking of the church as an official organization—and I make no exceptions. There are many noble men among the ministry who with courage stand out boldly against these iniquitous wrongs—but they soon find themselves without jobs.

THE METHODIST CHURCH TODAY.

A few weeks ago the Methodist Rock River conference of Illinois met. One of the questions which occupied the attention of the conference to the exclusion of all others was the one presented by the employes of the Methodist Book Concern—one of the largest printing plants in the United States. The printers asked for an eight-hour day; not an unreasonable request. What was the reply of these ministers of the gospel? An emphatic “No!” It was not so much a question between the Methodist Book Concern and their printers as it was a question between the employing printers of the United States and their employes. On the floor of that conference a Methodist minister arose to his feet and in an impassioned address told the conference that they must resist these demands of the wage workers; they must stand by the employers, as their interest was the church’s interest. And so the Methodist church, for the first time since industrial wage slavery was inaugurated, officially took its stand in favor of the master class and against the working class.

Do you wonder there is a conflict between the Socialists and the church?

It, therefore, naturally follows that there is a conflict between the church and the Socialists. The church stands for the order of yesterday. The Socialists stand for the order of tomorrow. We look across the border and see there the emancipation of the workers of the world. We see a new interpretation of the scriptures and we behold a nation of real brothers and of Christians, such as the Christ hoped would inhabit the world,
Socialism, Labor, and Religion

BY REV. W. M. BALCH.

[Just how every new industrial movement has at first the condemnation of those who adhere to the old method of making a living, and gradually wins from all institutions the support of such as can see the coming new methods of making a living, is illustrated by the following lecture delivered before the Epworth League in the Methodist church at Girard, Kan., by Rev. W. M. Balch of Topeka, Kan., in the winter of 1913-14. Rev. Balch had written a book on the subject of “Socialism, Labor and Religion,” which was published by Sherman, French & Co., hence has made something of a study of the subject, and this address is made up in part from one chapter in this book. The address caused several members of the Girard church to protest, though obviously intended to be a fair statement, and the pastor of the Girard church, Rev. Gardner, took occasion from the pulpit to denounce his fellow preacher for “talking politics” in the pulpit. A few months later, when a combination of all parties had beaten the Socialist candidate for mayor, Rev. Gardner sat quietly in his parsonage adjoining the church and made no protest when his church bell was rung in celebration of this “political action.” The time is coming, however, when the church will declare for socialized industry, and then it will insist that it always was opposed to the immorality of profits. When Socialism comes into power the doctrine of economic determinism, applying to the new, honest and easy way of making a living, will mean that what is known as spiritual development can have a chance such as it has never had before.]

THE most significant outgrowth of the modern labor movement is Socialism. In its fundamental criticism of the present social order, in its exalted vision of the future social order, and in its living faith in that vision, Socialism ranks next to Christianity itself among the idealisms of history. No study could be more timely, whether for Socialist, Labor-unionist or Christian, than the study of Socialism in its relations with the labor movement and Christianity.

SOCI ALISM ITSELF.

In these days one is likely to be bluntly asked, “Do you believe in Socialism?” The answer is at once as difficult and
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as easy as though the question had been, "Do you believe in religion?" For just as religion may mean anything from fetichism to "the mind that was in Christ Jesus," so some who are called Socialists vision anything from "the red fool-fury of the Seine" to the Holy City of the Apocalypse.

Whether many of these types are entitled to the name of Socialism is sometimes denied both by adherents and opponents, and yet all these types have been so named and have so named themselves. To avoid confusion, the present discussion will be confined to the evolutionary type. In this sense it is well defined by the late Edmond Kelley as "the theory that the production, transportation, and distribution of the necessities of life can to a certain extent today, slowly to a larger degree, and perhaps eventually altogether, be best undertaken by the collective action of the city or state through the substitution of co-operation for competition, and social for self-interest."

PERSONALITY AND SOCIALISM.

Personalities are not in question. Our subject is not Socialists but Socialism. Crooked thinking at this point is not uncommon. It is a frequent remark that "Socialists are mostly long-haired men and short-haired women"—with an adverse conclusion to Socialism. A college woman said: "Where I used to live I saw so much of the Socialists that I don't want to hear any more about the subject." A man remarked: "I don't think much of Socialism; half the Socialists don't comb their hair." These are probably unwarranted views. Yet even though true, history has something to say for the "long-haired men and the short-haired women." I can remember when that taunt used to be hurled regularly at the prohibitionists; and now we are garnishing the tombs of these prophets. The abolitionists in their time included the same class in their
OPPOSES SOCIALISM.

Methodism in its heroic days was accompanied by a very orgy of fanaticism. The Puritans in their day were accompanied by the Fifth Monarchy men, the Ranters and the Muggletonians. The Christians of the martyr age included thousands of wild-eyed, half-crazed fanatics. Thus history teaches us not to be discouraged with an advance movement on account of the "long-haired men and the short-haired women who attach themselves to it." Nor can we dismiss a great system of thought with a personal criticism of its adherents.

SOCIALISM NOT IMMORAL.

Essential Socialism is no menace to morality and religion. I have heard it declared that some Socialists hold atheism to be a part of Socialism; but I don't have to believe them. I have heard it charged that some Socialists hold loose sexual relations to be part of Socialism, but I don't have to believe them. The most irreligious and immoral doctrines that might have been advocated in the name of Socialism, even if all that prejudiced opponents say is true, are no more irreligious or immoral than some doctrines that have been advocated in the name of Christianity. No doctrine of materialistic determinism taught by any Socialists could be more irreligious than the doctrine of theological determinism almost universally held to be identical with Christianity 200 years ago. No doctrine of family life advocated by any Socialists is more immoral than the preaching of polygamy by Mormons in the name of Christianity. Neither Socialism nor Christianity should be judged by the individual beliefs of a few, but by the essential heart of its teachings.

In this sense, for instance, Socialism is not artificial nor "contrary to nature," but, as truly as individualism, is an original factor in nature, as seen in the "collectivism" of the ant-hill and the bee-hive. Nor is such Socialism altogether
WHY THE CHURCH

visionary and untried. It is even now the operative principle of the family, the school and the church, and even in the political state is exemplified by our highways, parks, waterworks, postal system, and all those colossal properties involved in the present conservative problem. It was general in primitive society and generic in primitive Christianity.

SOCIALISM NOT AGAINST PRIVATE PROSPERITY.

Nor does Socialism propose altogether to abolish private property. Goods for consumption would, of course, remain the private property of the consumers. Goods for production, (that is, capital) might be either private or common property, according to whether they are for private use or for common use. That is, the carpenter’s saw or the artist’s pencil might be private property, but a railroad or a factory would be public property. Reasonable Socialists would probably say that a man might properly own any kind of property except such as gives him control over other men’s living; property of the latter kind should be owned by all men in common. In a word, the choice is not between individualism and Socialism as mutually exclusive, but just as individualism now is largely socialistic, so would Socialism then be largely individualistic.

Socialism also disclaims any menace to the individuality of personal character. It is possible indeed that in the lower industrial processes which satisfy those physical needs in which individuals are nearest alike, work would then be done by routine and the workers would be regimented. But this kind of work, according to the socialistic exposition, would thus be reduced to the minimum, and this done, all the workers would still have abundant time and vitality for those higher pursuits in which men exercise their highest choices and develop their individualities. Says John A. Hobson: “In a word, the highest division of labor has not yet been attained,
—that which will apportion machinery to the collective supply of the routine needs of life, and art to the individual supply of the individual needs. In this way alone can society obtain the full use of the labor-saving character of machinery, minimizing the amount of human exertion engaged in tending machinery and maximizing the amount engaged in the free and interesting occupations." Thus Socialism proposes that individuality shall have for its security, no longer the "special privilege" of the few, but "equality of opportunity" for everyone.

**SOCIALISM AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT.**

In its fundamental character the labor movement is more than a strife for higher pay and shorter hours. It is the progress of industrial democracy, and its consummation will come when the economic order, as well as the political government, shall be "of the people, for the people, and by the people." Inasmuch as trade-unionism is a fighting force for obtaining specific economic gains to labor, it can never be adequate to the fulfillment of the labor movement in its higher ideals of universal democracy, justice, fraternity and peace. Socialism is the collective name for these ideals.

Socialists maintain that the laboring-class, no matter how well "unionized," is always at a disadvantage in its present struggle with capital. Hunger forever fights against the class that lives by its labor only, and for the class that lives by capital; for capital is but another name for the opportunity to labor and live. Hence, "whatever terms organized labor may succeed in winning are always temporary and insecure, like the hold which a wrestler gets on the body of his antagonist. Moreover . . . it has to wrestle on its knees with a foreman who is on his feet." Socialism proposes that no class
nor man shall hold such an advantage over others, but that social capital shall be held in common for the common good.

Socialists maintain, again, that trade-unionism is inadequate because it implies the continued division of society into hostile classes,—capitalists and wage-workers. As a war-measure unionism serves the higher ends of the labor movement in the same imperfect way that an inefficient army serves the true welfare of a nation. Hence Socialism proposes that all laborers become also capitalists, and all capitalists become laborers, and so that the industrial war shall end in the fusion of the warring classes.

Socialists further maintain that unionism is no remedy for monopoly. The tendency to monopoly is one of the most ominous phenomena of the time and the power thus developed is probably the greatest power ever exerted by men over their fellowmen. Were this power to be transferred from the directors of some great corporation to the executive committee of some great labor union, or to be held jointly by both, the interests of society would be no more secure than at present; on the latter supposition probably less so, since the most powerful monopolies even now seem to be those in which there is apparent collusion between the monopolistic management and its unionized employes. Hence Socialism proposes that the whole public be admitted into the combination; in other words that society become its own monopolist.

To set labor free from the advantages of capital in our present industrial war, to end the industrial war itself, to provide that monopoly shall accrue to the public good instead of private gain,—to achieve these ends would at once fulfill the labor movement and inaugurate the socialistic state.

Whatever disagreement may be asserted between Socialism and Christianity, it can hardly be denied that they agree in their motive and in their aim. For the common motive of Chris-
tianity and Socialism is conscientious concern for the injustices and cruelties of the present social order. And the common aim of Christianity and Socialism is the perfection of the social order.

With agreement as to motive and aim, the only possible disagreements would be as to methods. Many Socialists there may be who profess to repudiate, not only certain sects, creeds and dogmas, but Christianity itself. But many Christians there are who profess to repudiate, not only certain socialistic programs, platforms, and propositions, but Socialism itself. An increasing number, among Socialists and Christians alike, are moved by the conviction that socialistic schemes, apart from the divine vitality of religion, will be ever inert and sterile, while Christian principles, apart from their application to the human realities of society, are perverted from their divine purpose. Hence, the demand that, in addition to the common motive and common aim of Socialism and Christianity, we now find such common methods as shall make complete an adequate and operative system of Christian Socialism.

To this end it will not be necessary for either party to champion every theory or proposal which may call itself by the name of Socialism. But it will be necessary for all concerned to understand one another better than at present. Christian men must give unprejudiced hearing to the cause of the Socialists and must invite reciprocal candor toward the cause of Christ. The Christian must thankfully honor the Socialist's noble faith that the brotherhood of man can really be made to work. The Socialist must thankfully honor the Christian's faith that the Fatherhood of God will make it work. The Christian must unlearn his notion that Socialism proposes nothing but social conflagration in this world. The Socialist must unlearn his notion that Christianity proposes nothing but insurance against conflagration in the world to
WHY THE CHURCH OPPOSES SOCIALISM.

come. Each must recognize in the other the witness of an exalted vision. Each must recognize in the other's vision his own from another angle. And finally both must seek the ways of working together in order that their visions at last may be embodied in the fact and substance of that Co-operative Commonwealth which will also be the new Jerusalem out of Heaven from God.
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