

Fraternity, or the Principles of Brotherhood.

BY THE REV. C. G. BROWN, B.A.

Canon Residentiary of St. David's Cathedral.

A CONSIDERATION of what is meant by fraternity, or brotherhood, and of all that brotherhood entails, cannot be out of place with members of a men's society.

That "all men are brethren" is a generally accepted truth; but too frequently it is a mere expression, conveying no idea of duty or of responsibility. And yet it expresses a relation in which human beings stand to each other which is permanent and real.

We know that a nation is divided into many classes, and that the interests of these classes are not always the same. We know, too, that these classes are not permanent, and that members of one not unfrequently pass up or down into the other. One thing that does remain permanent is the State or the Nation. No matter how individuals or classes may change, the nation remains one; but if one class suffers, others suffer with it; if one class is improvident, unfortunate, unsuccessful, or guilty of wrong, the prosperity of the nation as a whole declines. Therefore it does not matter what may be the political aspect of any Government—Conservative, Liberal, or Radical, its legislation is foredoomed to failure if its legislation is in the interest of one class only, or if, in its efforts for the benefit of one class, it does not provide for the welfare of the whole.

Up to within almost modern times, and even at the present time with many people, the idea prevailed that the prosperity of a country can be estimated by its wealth. Now it is seen that a country may be very wealthy, and yet the bulk of the nation may be anything but prosperous—that the wealth may be in the hands of the few, and poverty and, even destitution the lot of the many. And this is the condition in which we now find ourselves; and this is the cause of the unrest so prevalent—an unrest which will, in all probability, end in a social upheaval,

whose results it is impossible to foresee. The principles on which money can be *gathered together* are understood. Men are now seeking for principles on which money can be more justly and *more widely distributed*. We all know that wealth of all kinds represents labour. It is produced by the labour of somebody—labour of head as well as labour of hand. If one man secures too large a portion of it, another man has to be content with too small a share; and when this is appreciated, there arise discontent, clamour, and mutiny. This is one evil result.

Another evil result is this: the accumulation of wealth in private hands creates a class of men who have abundant means to spend on themselves. If they have no sense of duty, and are forgetful of their responsibility to the country in which they live, they are worse than useless. They are the idle rich—the heirs of those who by their industry created the wealth, who spend their lives in self-indulgence. Now, indulgence is the parent of vice, and the vices of some of these soon end their existence. Others, more prudent, live on; but, as satisfaction of mind is allotted by Providence only to industry, the lives of these men are aimless, useless, and unhappy. But the contrast between their wealth and idleness and the poverty and excessive labour of the many, arouses an indignation and dissatisfaction which may become dangerous.

Idleness, whether of rich or poor, whether it is voluntary idleness or compulsory, is not only a source of weakness to a nation, it is a positive danger; and being so, it should be the aim of our legislators to prevent it. How they are to prevent it is the problem that has to be solved.

Political economy, which has long been the gospel of the legislator, has urged *free competition* as the principle of business life, and free competition has certainly increased the wealth of the nation; but this wealth is in the possession of the few, and when it is pointed out that free competition produces cheapness and over-production, and that cheapness means sweated labour and low wages, while over-production means uncertainty of

work and times of great distress—political economy says *that* is inevitable—that the rule of life is the “survival of the fittest” and “the weakest must go to wall.” As a matter of fact, political economy knows nothing of self-sacrifice, and in political economy there is no room for Christian principles, or for the idea of brotherhood.

Again, *co-operation* is suggested as an antidote to free competition, as when men co-operate for the production or the distribution of goods, the profits are divided amongst the workmen themselves. But free competition, with a fair division of the profits among the workmen, is quite as advantageous as co-operation, and both do very well as long as profits are made; but when there are losses instead of profits, both do equally badly. The Socialist condemns both principles, and the Socialist claims that his desire is to make the brotherhood of man a reality. As Socialism is at present agitating the world, let us try and understand what are its principles, its aims, and its methods.

In the first place, remember that any interference of the State, which limits the freedom of the individual, with the intention of benefiting the whole community, is socialistic. You will see that the tendency of legislation for many years has been socialistic. Interference with the drink traffic; prohibition of the employment of women and children; limiting the hours of labour; compulsory education; old age pensions; compulsory insurance—all this is socialistic. Again, municipal trading in water, gas, tramways, is socialistic. Can we say that this is injurious to the nation, or are we prepared to say that its good results outweigh the evil—if there be any evil results?

Now, the Socialist claim is that the nation should recognize the brotherhood of man as a reality, and that all legislation should be based on the principle of brotherhood. If it were, he holds that the evils under which the bulk of the people live would cease—poverty, destitution, unemployment, sweated labour, a low standard of comfort, wretched dwellings, drunkenness, the too great wealth of the few, all would end, he says; and as he believes these are the results of *free competition*, he

would end free competition by making the State the sole producer and the sole distributor of goods. He asserts that the high prices of food are due to the land being uncultivated, and that it is uncultivated because it is improperly held as the property of individuals; therefore, he holds that the State should own the land, and should distribute it amongst practical men. The Socialist does not necessarily advocate that the nation should confiscate these properties, but that legislation should be of such a kind that the nation shall gradually acquire them by purchase, or by at first becoming itself a rival competitor.

I think we shall agree that the principle advocated by the Socialist seems sound and his aims just; but his methods want consideration.

First, as to the ownership of land. He says the State should own it, and allot portions to capable cultivators. "But is the State to take back the possession of these portions at its pleasure? If yes, then what becomes of personal liberty? If no, then the land is divided amongst a *multitude* of possessors instead of a few." That may be regarded as an improvement; but what would prevent these people from selling their interest in these possessions? What, then, could prevent these small properties being united into large ones? "If personal liberty is to be allowed, you may divide land as you please, but the land will not remain so divided very long."

Next, as to competition. The Socialist would end competition in order to end the evils which he believes are due to competition; and he would end competition by the State becoming the sole producer and sole employer of labour.

Now the *State* is a competitor in production already, as a manufacturer in its dockyards, powder factories, clothing manufactories, gunmaking shops, and so on, and it is a great employer of labour in the Army, Navy, Police, and Post Office. *Municipalities* are also large employers of labour. It is only right to ask the Socialist whether these businesses are as successful and economical as similar businesses conducted by private individuals; whether the work is better done, whether

those employed are better treated or more satisfied than men otherwise employed. The answer should be emphatically in the affirmative, before we extend the system. We cannot say the State, as an employer, has shown itself heedful of the welfare of its workmen, if we are to judge by its treatment of boy clerks, messenger boys, and discharged soldiers.

Competition is said to bring out the best qualities in man—his highest ability, his greatest effort, his best work—and ordinary men are said to be most energetic when they know they will reap the *results* of their work. It is said that Government and municipal workmen are not remarkable for their energy or industry. The Socialist reply would be that, when men take their proper position as citizens, their sense of duty will make all industrious, or, the sense of duty inspiring the majority will compel the others to energetic work. But should we wait until men have learned such a sense of duty, or should we make the change, in hope that the change would lead to this sense of duty?

Two other demands the Socialist makes—viz., the right to work and a minimum wage for the worker, and to the workman these demands seem reasonable. But what he does not see is this: that if these demands are conceded the concession will be accompanied by demands which are serious. If the right to work is conceded and a minimum wage is fixed, a man will no longer be free to work when he likes and how he likes, but will be compelled to work always, at work required of him, and to the satisfaction of those set over him. He will be no longer a *free man* but a serf, not a slave, for a slave has no right, and a serf has. "A serf and a freeman are like two horses, one in a stable and the other at large. The one gets oats and no freedom, the other gets freedom but no oats, although he may get fodder of some kind." Serfdom is not freedom, and history is not without its lessons how manhood deteriorates when freedom is lost. The question is, whether the men of this country are prepared to exchange their freedom and uncertainty of employ for serfdom and a minimum wage.

Now, I have referred to these matters, not to advocate any

particular political principles, not to further nor oppose socialistic ideas, but to suggest some subjects for thought.

We are a society—a brotherhood—pledged to prayer and to render service to our fellow-men. But we so pledge ourselves because we desire the advancement of Christianity, and through it the advancement of mankind. It seems to me that it is our duty to consider what means the leaders of the people are suggesting for the benefit of our nation, and to see whether the ends they have in view and the means they suggest are consistent with the teaching of our Divine Master Jesus Christ.

There is now in progress a movement, really a great social upheaval, whose results, whether for good or evil, no one can foretell. As men we should understand what it means, what are its causes, what its leaders are trying to do, and how they propose to do it; and we should think whether what they aim at is good, and whether the means they propose for attaining their desire are such as we can support.

How are we to come to a decision? I believe there is only one test which we can apply, and that is the teaching of Jesus.

Now, "it was Jesus who first taught the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. It was He who revealed to the world that God is a God of love, mercy, and benevolence, and urged that, as these are the qualities of God, they must be the qualities of His children. It was Jesus who gave men a code of morals to be their rule of life, and principles of conduct to be their guide. His teaching broke down the barrier between Jew and Gentile, between black and white. His teaching freed the slave, softened the cruelties of war, secured justice, benevolence, freedom, and good government. From Him men learned the sanctity of life and their right to liberty." Therefore, we may be sure that Christianity can give us that by which the principles, aims, and methods of Socialism can be tested.

What does Christianity say about *labour*? Where work is done by slaves, both labour and the labourer are held in contempt. Now Christianity abolished slavery, and by so doing it taught—

1. That labour is honourable and idleness is contemptible.
2. That it is by work alone that man can develop his

faculties and his sense of responsibility, and that, as it is his duty to God, to man, and himself, so to develop, every man should work.

3. That man must not be regarded as a means for enriching others.

This being Christian teaching, any legislation in favour of the labourer, which will aid him to come up to the Christian standard, must receive our support. Any legislation which insists upon all men having opportunities for sharing in the benefits of education, for living in decency and comfort, for adequate rest and recreation, any regulations which will *provide* work, which will *secure* men in their employment, which will *protect* them from unjust and unscrupulous employers or overseers; these, and such as these, being in accordance with the ideas of Christian brotherhood, we should encourage; but remembering that voluntary idleness is a sin, and seeing that human nature is what it is, we must so hedge about our regulations that the community shall be protected from the idle and worthless.

Next with regard to property. Christianity nowhere forbids one of its brotherhood to hold property. It regards the universal desire of men to enjoy the fruits of their own labour as a natural desire; but it bids men regard their property *as a trust*. It holds that men may not do what they please with their own; it bids them use it for the benefit of others, and it teaches that God will hold men responsible for the use they make of it. That "property has its duties as well as its rights" is a Christian saying: if these duties are ignored, it is due to selfishness, and Christianity condemns selfishness as incompatible with brotherhood.

We cannot, therefore, support the Socialist who says a man should not own property. If his aim in ending competition is to end private ownership, we cannot support him; if his aim is simply to end sweated labour, or excessive cheapness of goods (which is the chief cause of low wages and of unemployment), then we agree with him. If he contends for a living wage for all workmen, whether they are industrious or idle, able or

worthless, we must object; but if he can suggest means by which all workmen shall receive a fair share of the profits of their work we will support him. But we cannot forget that the character of a brotherhood depends on the character of the individuals who are members of the brotherhood, and that, if we regard the nation as a brotherhood, we must strive for improvement in the character of its citizens before we can hope for improvement in their lives and conduct. Improvement in character cannot be brought about by compulsion nor by legislation; but legislation can adopt means by which men can be led to self-improvement.

When a community, or the larger part of a community, will adopt the first principles of Christianity as their practical rule of life, social improvement will be certain; and that principle is this: that "the condition of right conduct is self-sacrifice. Every act of man which can be called a *good act* is an act of self-sacrifice—*i.e.*, it is something a man would *not* have done had he considered his own personal pleasure rather than the benefit of someone else. And, in the common things of life, self-sacrifice quickens the sense of positive duty, and the *good* man does his duty because he knows that, by so doing, others are benefited, and that, like his Divine Master, he is among others as one that serveth."

Christian teaching, then, points to the *cause* of all the evils that exist, and indicates their only remedy. The *cause* is sin and the selfishness which accompanies and results from sin. The *remedy* is self-sacrifice and self-discipline. As selfishness is the failing of the individual, so the individual must apply the remedy to himself. Throughout his life, his family, his neighbours, and his country have claims upon him, and he must acknowledge this and meet those claims; but to do so, he must throw off selfishness—in other words, Christianity tells us we cannot spread the idea of fraternity by force, neither can we establish a brotherhood by compulsion. We can make ourselves fit for it, and we can join with others in making such arrangements that the whole nation may learn how to make themselves fit for it.