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By A. CLUTTON BROCK.

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SOCIALISM AND THE ARTS OF USE.

Government and the Arts of Use.

THE question whether Socialism is likely to encourage or to discourage art is of practical importance to Socialists because many people believe that it would make an end of all art, and are therefore opposed to it. Their belief is based upon the fact that our present Government is seldom successful when it tries to encourage art. They point to our Government offices, our memorials to deceased monarchs, and the work of our art schools, as examples of Socialist art, and they ask whether that is better than the art produced in answer to a private demand.

Certainly it is not; and the Government failure in the matter of architecture has aroused a very strong prejudice against Socialism among architects. They practise the most important of all the arts, and they tell us, from their own experience, that the Government is usually unfortunate in its choice of architects and that it prevents them from doing their best after it has chosen them. This I do not deny—one has only to look at our Government buildings to see that it must be true—but these opponents of Socialism assume that in a Socialist State all art would be at the mercy of the conscious patronage of the Government. They do not ask themselves whether in a Socialist State there might not arise conditions as favorable to the natural growth of architecture and all the arts of use as our present conditions are unfavorable. They assume that those arts, in the modern world, can only be kept alive by the abnormal interest of a few individuals, and they think that Socialism would deprive those few of their power of patronage.

Socialism will not Produce an Immediate Improvement.

This assumption I believe to be wrong. Socialism might destroy the patronage of the abnormal few; but it might also make an interest in art, and particularly in the arts of use, normal. And my aim now is to explain why I believe it would do this.

But first I will admit that, if we could suddenly start now with any complete system of Socialism in full working order, I do not for a moment believe we should have an immediate improvement in our pictures or Government offices or public statues or in the memorials to deceased monarchs. There would, no doubt, be more money spent upon public art and less upon private; but the public art for a time would be just what it is now, and the artists chosen would be those who have an ill-deserved eminence in our present society. It is the general taste that makes art good or bad. It does not produce artists of genius, but it uses them or wastes them.

Whistler said that art happens, by which he meant, I suppose, that people like himself happen : that no society, by taking thought, can cause them to be born. But it is not true that works of art, like Bourges Cathedral, happen, any more than Dreadnoughts happen. They are the results of a long, common, and well directed effort. That kind of effort does not exist now, and in the most favorable circumstances it could only begin slowly, and would continue for some time before it could produce any great results.

Art Manifests Itself First not in Ornament but in Design.

At present the art of building and the art of all objects of use is commonly supposed to be an art of ornament. Architecture means to most of us a kind of ornamented building. Gothic is distinguished from Renaissance by its ornament, by traceried windows and cusps and crockets and so on ; and we are always complaining that we have no style of our own in architecture or furniture or anything else.

But the artistic instinct when it works in the making of objects of use does not first show itself in ornament, but in structure, and it may express itself triumphantly without any ornament.

The artistic instinct, when it first begins to move in the making of an object of use, is not consciously artistic at all. It shows itself mainly in a desire to make that object as well as it can be made, and of the closest possible adaptation to its function. But this desire must be in itself disinterested if it is to produce art. It pays, no doubt, at least in healthy societies, to make things as well as they can be made. But the artistic instinct will not grow out of a mere desire to make them well so that they may sell. For the next stage in the development of that instinct is a recognition of the beauty of a thing that is well adapted to its function ; from which follows an effort to insist upon that beauty for its own sake while at the same time preserving the perfect adaptation to function. It is upon this recognition and this effort that all architectural excellence depends, and indeed all excellence of design. When art is growing and vigorous, it is because men see the natural functional beauty of the things which they make for use and because they try to increase that beauty, perhaps with ornament but certainly with pure design, which does not disguise function but emphasizes it. But the beauty must be seen before it can be heightened with art.

The Recognition of Functional Beauty.

We are amazed at the beauty of the great French Gothic cathedrals, and we think of it as a romantic thing of the past that we can never attain to. But how did the builders of the Middle Ages attain to it? Not in the least by their facility in designing and carving ornament ; not by their tracery or stained glass or statues. Those things were only the overflow of their energy. A church might have them and yet be bad. It might lack them all, even the stained glass, and yet be noble. What they did was to be aware of the natural functional beauty of a plain building well

