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Vanguard Leaflet.

Labour's Religion.

Reprinted from the "Worker."

Every week, as penance for my sins, I tread with naked mind the wordy waste of the Worker's exchanges.

It is a Pilgrim's Progress fraught with many tribulations. Last week, for instance, I stubbed my mental toes against this jagged flint in the columns of Drake's Commonwealth:

That a large number of prominent Labour leaders, all over the world, are atheists, agnostics, and miscellaneous freethinkers, is undeniable. Even the Brisbane Worker, the official organ of the Australian Labour Federation, is openly materialistic—contemptuously discarding spiritual and moral forces as factors in the solution of social problems.

This is said in support of the allegation that "the Labour party is irreligious;" though Senator Drake is good enough to add that "personally he does not think a majority of Labour electors are irreligious."

Labour electors will no doubt signify at the ballot box later on what they think of the patronising exoneration. The Worker, speaking out of the mouth of its Fool, gives thanks forthwith that among its manifold delinquencies it has at least done nothing to earn it the imprimatur of this Quack.

Irreligious? What is it to be irreligious? Nay, turn the question round—To be religious, what is that?

We pluck a flying feather from thy wing, O Drake, to write the answer.

There are many ways of being religious. You may be religious like a bishop, by rule and rote and ritual. Or like the witch doctor of some savage tribe, dancing with bared blade among the faithful, seeking a victim for the sacrifice.

Or like the gentle Sister of Mercy, afloat on a calm current of good deeds. Or like the whirling dervish, lashing his piety to the frenzy point of self-mutilation.

Or you may be religious like the poet, in whose soul the beauty of nature sets the Angelus ringing. Or like the rude iconclast who smashes all definite shapes of God, and is mute and reverent before the all-pervading sense of the Eternal.

Or you may see God in the Eucharist, like the pious Catholic. Or like the Pantheist, behold his Real Presence in all that is—the flower that you pluck for loving, the toad that you turn from for loathing; the mighty ocean and the protoplasmic ooze upon its floor; the towering mountain and the pebble at its base; the suns, the moons, the stars, burning forever in unfathomable deeps, and the microscopic parasite whose universe is a single atom; in these, like the Pantheist, seeing not the works of God merely, but God himself.

When little minds say that the Labour party is irreligious, they mean that it does not bind him

within the covers of a book, or lock him up in a box, to be let out once a week for the exclusive benefit of the elect.

They mean that it is not religious in their particular way, which is often some very narrow way, cramping the soul instead of filling it with the divine afflatus that lifts to heaven.

These little minds, measuring us with their little creeds! Little in their judgments because little in their comprehensions.

The largest conception that most of them seem capable of is the hell to which they consign the vast majority of men who do not conform to their littleness.

There are many ways of finding God that they wot not of. You may tread the Milky Way, and knock at the gates of the Stars seeking him. Or you may seek and find him in the gutters of life.

The Labour party finds him in the service of humanity. Can one strive to make Man better than he is, and be irreligious? Can one carry the light of hope into dark places, and know not God?

Answer, O little minds!

The Worker, they say, is "openly materialistic." Let us plead guilty to the impeachment.

We believe in good food, good clothes, and decent houses to live in.

We believe that men are influenced by their material surroundings. We believe that virtue doesn't get a chance to blossom in the slums, and that the sweater sows more seeds of evil than any devil of mythology.

We believe that matter and spirit are so mysteriously united that they suffer or sing together, and together are uplifted or debased.

Squalid conditions produce squalid souls. A noble people can

exist only in an ennobling environment.

Nothing in the wide world is so sensitive to its surroundings as the Spirit. The tenderest bud calls for less care. The soil in which it is to grow must be carefully adjusted to its needs. Its delicate youth must be shielded from the blistering winds that blow from the mouth of the Pit. It must be assiduously cultivated, for the Garden of the Soul reverts rapidly to its primitive wildness.

The Labour party does not meddle in the supernatural, if that's what the little minds mean.

It sets up no God to be worshipped on pain of damnation. It realises that for each of us God is something different, while still in essence the same.

It concerns itself only with the material side of existence; but it realises that the materialistic is the sun, soil, and shower in which the flowers of the Spiritual unfold and have their being.

Even the saint must eat. Up-rooted from the sap-giving earth the buds of holiness wither and fall. What do you expect to find in the slums—saints or savages?

To be materialistic in the Labour sense is not to be irreligious. Nay, it is doubtful if this stigma of the little minds can be fastened even upon those who assert that nothing exists but matter. For grant these what they claim, and matter then becomes the Eternal and the Inscrutable.

Whatever the philosophic outlook, always for thoughtful minds there looms the great mystery of Consciousness, or Intelligence, or Spirit—call it what you will.

Say that it is inherent in the nature of matter, or that it is a permeation of matter from without; nothing is solved either

way. You don't get rid of mystery by sticking a label on it.

How does matter think? What is the Thinking Principle?

To most upon this subject meet come the conviction of some transcending Power in the universe.

They have not all called it God; they have not all presumed to be upon confidential terms with it; but it seems to me that there you have the root idea of religion.

We do not all see God alike—not even in the shaving glass; though some of us seem content at such moments to hold the mirror up to nature, and seek nature's God no farther.

The little minds can conceive of no God beyond the limits of their parochial theologies.

The Labour party knows that in all that is in nature there is something of the divine. It knows that the Soul is influenced by its environment, and it guesses it was for this reason God gave us a lovely and fertile world to dwell in.

The Labour party is materialistic, but its materialism aims at putting an end to the present un-

godly distribution of God's wealth.

Irreligious! The Labour party, irreligious! These little

The Labour movement is Christ's movement. Like Christ, it comes to preach the gospel of the poor; to convince men of the iniquity of riches in private hands; to pull down the mighty from their seats, and exalt the lowly.

And like Christ it preaches the redemption of the race through brotherhood and equality, and the upraising of a temple not built by hands.

In the Master's words it says, "Come unto me all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

* * *

Yet in the millennium we hope for there will be left a comfortable margin for human imperfections. Socialism is a business proposition for plain men, not a prospectus for angels. We don't expect the lions to lie down with the lambs; nor is it necessary that all our Drakes should be swans.

TOUCHSTONE.

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