As in Great; So in Little

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Possibly it may interest the readers of *Commonweal* to know how Socialism and other advanced doctrines are penetrating into the heart of the Perthshire highlands. A short time ago a branch of the S.D.F. was formed in the fashionable town of Crieff by a few earnest Socialists, and an effort was made to raise the propaganda from its secret grooves into the broad light of day. With that object in view, comrade Glasier from Glasgow was invited to give a lecture on Socialism in the public square. A large crowd collected to hear our comrade; and for the first time they listened and learnt what Socialism really meant. The audience was large and most attentive, and from cool critical listeners they became most enthusiastic in demonstrating their approval of the new gospel. A meeting-place was secured, and later on Tom Mann was invited to give an open-air and also an in-door address, and again a good audience greeted our comrade's exposition of Socialism with decided approval. At both meetings a great quantity of literature was sold, including a few quires of *Commonweal* and *Justice*.

During the summer months the propaganda has considerably slackened; workers who reside in small country towns will be able to appreciate the cause of this. But although the meetings have been discontinued for the present, an attempt will again be made to carry on a series of indoor meetings during the coming winter. The little band of Socialists in Crieff are thorough, earnest men, and the secretary has both initiative and steady courage to make the movement in the district a genuine success. Where a few men are ready to act as well as give suggestions on "Organisation," much work can be done, and a feeling of reliance is inspired when enthusiasm is not confined merely to the tongue.

Seven miles west from Crieff, and undisturbed by the din of railway traffic, lies the sweet little village of Comrie. It is the very picture of peace and soothing rest, as it snugly nestles at the foot of a range of lofty mountains. It has made a slight noise in the world by the frequency of its earthquakes, but beyond a passing rumble at long intervals there has been nothing to make a boast of! But proud are the villagers of their earthquakes, and woe to the stranger who doubts their reality. One would think that here at least competition must be more humane, and that its vile trickeries and loathsome effects on the character must be less marked than in our large cities. The visitor who approaches Comrie with dreams of idyllic bliss has them rudely dispelled when he sets his foot across the bridge of Lednock. A vision of low narrow houses, stuffy looking and unhealthy, despite the pure air from mountain and stream, at once meets his gaze, and instead of a population with marks of strength and vigour on their faces, he sees prematurely old men and women with each wrinkle on their faces speaking loudly of the hard and long struggle for existence. In a population of something near 2,000, one is struck with the very small number of young men; and here the same pathetic tale has to be told of the forcing of the best blood, and possibilities of true manly character, into the dens of our large cities, there to swell the tide of gaunt competition among the large army of toilers. A few years ago between thirty and forty tailors in Crieff and Comrie could easily earn a comfortable livelihood, but now the sweating system has raised its ugly head and machinery and underpaid women will soon make the two or three that still remain a thing of the past.

The population of Comrie a short time ago was nearly double its present amount; and though plenty of land lies ready for useful cultivation, it is fast sinking out of existence. Glenartney and Glenlednock used to hear the merry sounds of human life, but everywhere one sees the ruined cottages of the "bold peasantry." The beautiful

glens, instead of yielding human food and supporting many healthy families, are being rapidly given over to sheep and deer. It is more profitable to the landlord; and to judge from the acquiescence of the authorities, we may suppose it is also beneficial to the community. Lord Aveland is the principal possessor of this quarter of the globe, and for his pleasure and profit has been "spurned the cottage from the green," and large acres of land given over to grouse, deer, and sheep. In the village the effect of competition is most marked upon the merchants. There are half a dozen grocers and bakers, and the struggle for customers is most humorous as well as pitiful. Each one possesses a van, and in order to secure a customer and place him on the list," the baker would carry a single loaf a halfpenny cheaper to Loch Earnhead–a distance of thirteen miles! Each of the merchants is of course religious, and they would fight to the death among themselves for the "Auld," Free or U.P. Churches; but when the little English chapel is opened in the summer time for three months to give diversity of entertainment to the grouse-shooting and deer-stalking visitors, then farewell creeds and Shorter Catechism! All the merchants with their wives and families religiously attend every service, and the heart of Sir Pertinax McSycophant would be gladdened by the elaborate scraping and "booing" of the local capitalists as the wealthy visitors are played out of church to the lively music of the "kist o' whustles." Of course the result is some "orders" in the ensuing week; and one can well believe they have been paid for dearly enough. I am told that the character of the people has completely changed within a recent period. Instead of being robust and self-dependent, with all the old hardy vigour of the Scotch character, they are snobbish, poor, and vain–the result of being compelled to hang out their banner for the attraction of summer visitors. Those who have stayed for any length of time at villages or towns dependent on the summer visitor, will know how false and corrupt the character becomes through the painful efforts to become "genteel" and look as if they had never done a stroke of work in all their lives.

It is long since the doctrines of Henry George penetrated to this place, and a most encouraging feature is the eagerness with which the land question and other social topics are discussed by the farmers, artisans, and even gamekeepers, and their readiness to embrace extreme views. They have undoubtedly ceased to hope for anything from either of the "great political parties," and slowly but surely the truth is dawning upon them that "Tories" and "Liberals" are mere phrases to keep them divided. The most of the young workmen here–mostly apprentices nearing the end of their term–are far more advanced in social questions than many of their city brethren, and I found a few of them studying Laurence Gronlund's valuable work. Quite an interesting picture could be presented to the readers of *Commonweal* of an old shoemaker, erect in figure and with quite a refreshing look of manly individuality on his face, seated on a stool in the centre of his clean-looking old thatched hut, surrounded by a number of young men listening eagerly as he read and expounded the leading articles from *Reynold's Newspaper*, all his utterance primed with the hottest sedition! The little school has now got considerably beyond *Reynolds*, but the old man will ever regard with affectionate fervour the slashing articles in that fairly honest and serviceable paper.

Is it not significant that wherever one goes it is social topics that are discussed and not political ones, and that our doctrines are penetrating silently everywhere, even without the aid of the propagandist? Competition itself is sending the schoolmaster abroad, and even the diseases it manufactures speak with a plaintive eloquence to all thoughtful men, and long before our first-class debaters in St. Stephen's have reached "Manhood Suffrage" the dissolution of our rotten society will be upon us.

J. M. B.