NOTES AND MEMORANDA.

"PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY."

That Adam Smith was a moral philosopher as well as political economist has often enough been cited as proof that the two fields are but portions of a common domain. Some are indeed so bold as to affirm that the dividing fence is a useless obstruction, and might be removed with no loss either to political economy or philosophy. A writer of Mr. Bonar's rank was in no danger of making such a mistake. We are shown in the new volume under the above title* how constant and intimate are the relations between the two. We are shown, with the skill of large and generous learning, how this problem of philosophy and economics lay in the thought of some score of master minds. Though Plato gave to the State a purely economic origin, Mr. Bonar says: "Historically, it is true that the economical element is in the Greek philosophy subordinated to the political, and still more to the ethical. Such economical doctrine as is traceable in the writings of the Greek philosophers grows out of their moral and political philosophy."

In mediæval and modern times political economy grows out of political philosophy. It is not that economics did not exist to these earlier thinkers, but it was so mingled with philosophic and political discussion as to lose all distinctness. "Accordingly, the philosophers of the earlier periods devoted more space in their philosophical books to economic discussions than the philosophers of the later, who were free to hand over all such discussion to the economists. Plato's treatment of economical subjects is for this reason much more ample than Hegel's."

* *Philosophy and Political Economy in some of their Historical Relations.* New-York: Macmillan & Co. 8vo. pp. 426.

This result of differentiation is, according to Mr. Bonar, limited chiefly to the more direct dealing with economic issues. It is admitted *indirectly* that at least economists concern themselves rather more than less with philosophic ideas.

> This appears not only in regard to the theory of the foundation of property, family, society, and State, but in regard to the psychology of the feelings, desires, and volitions connected with the pursuit of subsistence and wealth. The time when Political Economy became a distinct study in the hands of the Physiocrats and the Scottish Philosophers was also the time when the motives of an ordinary human life were investigated with the greatest curiosity. (p. 374.)

So far as ethics may be considered a part of philosophy, this truth appears more clearly still. If we except the more severely theoretic investigation, ethical writers are turning more and more to economics. One has but to glance at recent works, like those of Professors Ziegler, Höffding, and Paulsen, to see how large a series of questions is introduced that are distinctively economic. A distinguished philosophic teacher, Professor Riehl, of Freiburg, says, "I have meant to write a volume of ethics before now, but the changes introduced by economic questions compel me first to study my problem some years as if it were a new one." Loria's new volume, *Les Bases Economiques de la Constitution Sociale*, is at every point as much a book on morals as on economics. English economists illustrate the tendency no less strongly than those of any other nationality. It is common to say that economic science is spoiled if it be once mixed with ethical elements. Of the strict theory, as distinguished from practical application, this of course is true; but this distinction of functions is far from adequate. No one more successfully than Professor Sidgwick "keeps his moralizing where it belongs"; yet his economics as well as his political philosophy are profoundly modified by the point of view which he invariably takes,— the philosophical. Here, indeed, the greatest change in regard to the relation between economics and philosophy may be seen. However sharply functions are differentiated, writers seem more and more forced to look at the whole problem from a philosophical, ethical, and psychological standpoint.

This may be seen in the school which lays its supreme stress upon *consumption*. It may be seen in the growing emphasis that psychology is receiving. The closer becomes our familiarity with "social schemes," the more we find their ultimate differences in some sort of psychology. Owen, and, to a large extent, the socialists generally, have a view of human nature which is believed to justify their confidence that changed circumstance will produce a new humanity. Plans of social regeneration will be found in no way so radically to differ as in regard to this ultimate fact of human nature,— What sort of creature have we at last to deal with? *Are* the deeper qualities of character modifiable to any such extent? Whatever our views as to this point, we are brought straight to the great questions of evolution, heredity, and the like.

The very fact that we are getting our subject more specialized, that we are getting deeper into it, that we are getting a larger and more various order of facts classified, makes this philosophical standpoint necessary. As long as mere "production" was thought in some way to be central and final, as long as it was believed that the free and unhindered play of competitive forces would of themselves work out a society that should in any way satisfy our ideals, it was natural that the distinctly economic element should have chief place. In proportion, however, as distribution and consumption gain prominence, in proportion as man and his growth are seen to be the real end sought rather than wealth-creation, in that same degree the need of a philosophy of the situation is felt. Nothing now more marks the best economic thought than the tendency to set before itself some sort of ideal of human relationships in society. Such an ideal demands both a unifying and an interpretation of facts. Such unity and interpretation are impossible without a philosophy. The impulse to moralize in economics has doubtless played havoc with much political economy, yet the instinct to make ethical ends in some way a part of the problem was sound and right.

Now that it is possible to distinguish more clearly between the theoretic function and the application of principles, able writers are even more bold to determine the general problem

from points that are, first of all, philosophical. Overwhelming evidence of this can be seen in the new literature. So far as any change may be believed to have taken place, it is in the economist's readiness to subordinate strictly economic interests to interests that are held to be higher and more necessary.

Professor Smart, writing recently upon the "Place of Industry in the Social Organism," * says, "Is it not becoming evident that philosophy and economics must now join hands to find out and declare what is the true end and right relation of economic activity among the other activities of human life?" The "philosophical economist" or "economic philosopher" is to attempt this task. Probably the greatest change now taking place is the growing and conscious purpose deliberately to reorganize the industrial organism for certain ends that are extra-economic. It is every day more widely admitted that such ends will never be won by the "freedom of industry" alone, as this term has been understood. Mr. Bonar says in his treatment of Darwinism (page 361) "it becomes a theory of development very akin to the philosophical, for it really involves the conservation of the past; and, instead of the preservation of *mere life*, the object of the struggle is the attainment, deliberately conceived, of a *better* life."

It is the reaching of this better life for all to which the mere wealth concept is becoming relatively of less importance in the minds of economists. Especially in Europe it is appearing in legislation as distinctly as among the thinkers,— this determination by *artifice*, in its proper sense, to control industrial forces, so that the beginnings at least of a completer life shall be possible to the mass of the workers. Every special question is more and more discussed in the light of this purpose. The eight-hour issue, for example, is felt to be seriously dealt with, only if quite other questions are asked than those concerning the mass of the product alone. Economic specialists more and more admit that, even if quantity of product lessens, there may be a final gain to the worker that will amply compensate the loss. Here the severely economic element becomes secondary to another order of values that might be expressed in

* *International Journal of Ethics*, July, 1893.

terms of "social welfare," "more general opportunity of progress," or some kindred notion. There is hardly a phase of the "social question" of which the same is not true. In the growing struggle between the ideals of co-operation and profit-sharing the ultimate reasons for preference translate themselves into something more than could be contained in an economic equation. Mr. Bonar's splendid study makes us feel this in every chapter. In the sure scholarship of the historical portion we see that since Grotius the idea that mere force in industry is necessarily right or best becomes ever more discredited among the ablest thinkers, and in its place rises the idea that the only conditions we may tolerate — the only "natural right" — is in such ordered circumstances as shall make possible *for all* a rational human life. Here men of most various schools approach each other,— Krause, T. H. Greene, and Herbert Spencer.

The only criticism one feels in reading this volume springs from the limits which the author sets himself. Why, in such a work, is Comte scarcely more than a foot-note? It is hardly enough that he spoke ill of economics. His relation to sociology and the sheer force and extent of his influence upon that order of ideas with which Mr. Bonar deals would seem to warrant further space for one who, more than any other, has deepened our sense of "order and progress," and hence of the organic and dynamic facts of society. Mr. Bonar says of Kant (to whom a whole chapter is given) and Herder, "This service of theirs, which seems remote from economics, was, in reality, to be of great importance to that study." Of Comte could less be said?

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