

## BOOK REVIEWS.

## THE SOCIAL PROBLEM.\*

At a dinner in one of the smaller Western Scottish cities where the Lyric Muse has bestowed her favors with a lavish generosity, a toast was proposed, "To the minor poets of Scotland." Not one of the guests responded, each modestly assuming that he himself was included among the subjects of the toast. A similar reticence may forbid criticism of Dr. Ellwood's book "The Social Problem," on the part of those to whom it is dedicated, "The far-thinking men and women of the twentieth century who must solve the social problem;" and that office may therefore more appropriately devolve upon those who are conscious of no "call" to solve it, and who indeed are not prepared to admit that a problem in the sense suggested, really exists.

That this book is "the best existing application of sociological thinking to practical problems" as affirmed by Professor Edward A. Ross in a note on the cover, we must, though not without some diffidence, withhold our assent to. It contains sentences and paragraphs which every sincere lover of humanity must read with a whole-hearted sympathy. Its diction and "form" are all that could be desired, and its literary character is such as must satisfy the most fastidiously artistic taste. Its survey of the "Historical elements" that have contributed to the making of the alleged social problem which confronts us today, contains much valuable information and the philosophic reflections holding the items of information together are of an exceedingly satisfying kind. "The social problem" we assure its intending reader, is full of passages which, taken by themselves, make appeal to all that is best in the best of us. Who could quarrel with such opinions as "those who see clearly must perceive that while biologic and economic conditions may act as stimuli, the real roots of civilization are always in the mental attitudes and conscious values of individuals," or "civilization is at the bottom creation and trans-

mission of ideal values by which men regulate their conduct?" By such epigrammatic sentences as these we are carried along on that strong current of sympathy which a man of humanitarian enthusiasm generates, and are impelled to underline approvingly passages like the following: "Western civilization needs a great social and spiritual awakening. Its whole atmosphere must be changed. Justice must be established between man and man in economic and other relations of life and the tradition of peace must be established between nations." Not until one has reached the closing pages of the book and discovered how the postulates that form its groundwork are woven together to assume the shape of a definite social philosophy, does one realize where the writer intends to leave his readers, or get a clear conception of his real standpoint and spiritual attitude towards human life.

That attitude seems to be one against which we think it is the duty of every sincere believer in the principle of true democracy to protest with all the emphasis that courtesy will permit. It is the attitude of mind which assumes that some of us have been endowed with a divine mission to "control" our wayward fellow-creatures and to compel them along the paths of pleasantness and peace. That this attitude has become the dominant one among Professors of Sociology and political economy during recent years must be regretfully admitted. That it should find favor with the privileged classes and those "interests" that chiefly support our Universities, is not surprising, but it is equally easily understood that it should be repugnant to the mind of the man who has caught sight of the remoter implications of the gospel of liberty, and to whom the principle of democracy has begun to unfold some of its hidden meanings. Dr. Ellwood in the last page of his book remarks that "The Universities produce experts in law, medicine, agriculture and engineering, but experts in the problem of human living together, very rarely," but he offers no explanation of this curious fact. It is indeed strange that when a man wishes to construct a dam or to build a bridge, he consults a Professor of Engineering; when he wants to sink an artesian well

\*The Social Problem, by Charles A. Ellwood, Ph. D., Professor of Sociology in the University of Missouri. Crown 8vo, cloth, 249pp. Price \$1.25. The Macmillan Co., New York.

he seeks the advice of a professional geologist; if he aspires to scientific farming he consults an expert in chemical manures; but that seldom do we hear of legislators or politicians seeking the guidance of economists or sociologists before making new laws. It is surely not without significance that we have in the past been willing to regard our teachers of sociology like our professors of dead languages, as being parts of the necessary ornaments of a University life of today or of the unknown tomorrow. And the significance just lies in this, that the plain man knows well that the things sociologists propose to do cannot be done, that no one has a right to do them, and that if a right could be established no man or men have yet been born good enough or wise enough for the commission. We more than suspect that this unformulated conviction lying in the sub-conscious region of men's minds, is the real reason that experts in sociology have never been taken seriously by our legislators and practical politicians. Such incidents as the dismissal of Dr. Scott Nearing from the University of Pennsylvania can hardly fail to raise the question as to whether Professors of sociology are free to discover new aspects of truth in their particular branch, as are the Professors of Chemistry, Astronomy, or indeed any of the sciences whose discoveries do not challenge the frontiers of vested interests. It is not pleasant to raise such questions, but we live in strange and ominous times when as Dr. Ellwood himself says, all the symptoms exhibited by Western civilization indicate that something is brewing for the world of tomorrow that may be worse than a French Revolution; and in such times the mealy-mouth or the studied politeness suitable to less perilous days, may be out of place.

It is recorded in the book of Genesis that Cain asked a question of the Almighty to which no answer was given, "Am I my brother's keeper?" and it has been assumed by the world that the answer, had it been given and recorded, would have been an affirmative one. We venture to offer the opinion that had the Just and All-wise Judge of all the earth vouchsafed a reply to the murderer's question, it would have

been "No, you know very well you are not your brother's keeper, for if you were his keeper he would be your slave. Your first and only absolute duty to your brother, whether you love him or not, is to respect his life and liberty and to leave him free to pursue his own happiness." May we suggest that even to entertain the thought that The Supreme Wisdom might have returned such an answer to Cain's sneering question throws an entirely new light on "The social problem?" Might we not ask whether the solution of the problem should at least begin with a complete cessation of all interference with our brother's liberty? Have our orthodox sociologists and conservative reformers not fully justified the indictment made by Tolstoy, that humanitarian enthusiasts will do anything and everything for the poor and downtrodden except get off their backs?

The perilously unstable equilibrium of social forces which prevails at present in every corner of the world, and to all of which Dr. Ellwood is fully alive, must form a critic's apology for getting down to what he conceives to be the root of the matter. Our author affirms with apparent confidence that "the laissez faire attitude of the early nineteenth century has been entirely broken down with reference to economic conditions." Our reply must be similar to that frequently given by thoughtful men to the statement that Christianity has broken down, that it has not yet been tried. What has happened is that the phrase which British economists borrowed from the French Physiocrats of the pre-Revolution period, "Laissez aller, laissez faire" has been shorn of its first clause, with disastrous consequences to the morals of the world. The literal interpretation of the complete phrase is "Let go, let do," or more broadly "Let go restrictions and give freedom," or in the free translation which was accepted at the time, "clear the ways and leave things alone." It does not require much effort of the imagination for those who have any, to see what a different world we might have looked out upon today had the ideal embodied in the complete aphorism been preserved, had its full significance been kept hold of and made the

corner-stone of our political systems. To "let go restrictions" means to abolish law-made special privileges in favor of some men or classes of men, to the disadvantage of others. It means to establish equality of opportunity in the use of nature's bounty. It means the denial of Cain's right to kill his brother even by the bloodless method of laying claim to ownership of all the land within reach and preventing Abel from pursuing his peaceful pursuits as a keeper of flocks. The frightful conditions of economic slavery that prevailed in the early part of the nineteenth century under the rise of industrialism in Britain were due to men having adopted the second half of the French motto without the first; to having apotheosized the address of liberty without having first established her firmly on a base of "equality of opportunity." It is not surprising that the horrors of the time turned the whole current of Carlyle's naturally democratic soul into a wild and passionate protest against the liberty which seemed to mean "liberty to die of starvation."

The failure to realize that at the base of society men are not free to perform that first moral action, the earning of a living by labor or by the exchange of service, must surely be the cause of the rooted distrust shown by our author, of man's capacity to find the higher life for himself. We, Society, are to "control" the development of individual character by getting "control of heredity, social environment and personal education of all classes both employers and employees;" and we are to aim at the production of characters of a definite kind in which intelligence will predominate over instinct, and altruism over egoism. Leaving aside for the moment the pertinent question as to whether virtue that is "produced" is really virtue at all, and whether spontaneity is not of the very essence of spiritual value, the plain man naturally asks himself, "Who are we that we should arrogate to ourselves this right to marshal and drill our fellow men into the ways of well-doing." We think it probable that we express the feelings with which many will read this book, when we point to the colossal egotism involved in thus assuming

that a section of society (meaning ourselves who make the assumption) may act the part of God Almighty to any other section. Is this (we ask) a right or moral attitude in which any man or class of men may hold themselves in thought towards their brethren? If not, are we not inviting that rebuke which never fails to follow the footsteps of pride and arrogance? "Thus God might touch a Pope at unawares, ask what his baubles mean, and whose part he presumed to play just now."

Having assumed the incapacity of those who occupy the lower levels or back seats in the theatre of life, to develop of themselves the wider vision, the broader outlook, the refined tastes and the intellectual faculty which are the heritage of our race; the modern sociologist seeks to fix the duty of doing it for them upon the superior persons who sit in the stalls and boxes; with the inevitable consequence that a problem of frightful and constantly increasing complexity is presented for their solution. Indeed, the sociologist, the statesman, the philanthropist, or the reformer who realizes all that is involved in getting effective control of those elusive and imponderable forces, the ideas, ideals, and values which constitute the formative environment that greets each one of us as we enter the world, and who hopes by that means to remould society more nearly to his heart's desire, may well stand aghast at the magnitude of the task. What we all require indeed for the restoration of our peace of mind, is not the picture of a society which becomes more complicated with each new movement; but the vision of a future in which human relationships will become simpler and less complex and where things may have a chance to go right of themselves. Our ideally healthy man is not he who is kept so by the constant attendance of a physician, an oculist, an aurist and specialists of other kinds. The ideally healthy society (and the conviction of this lies deep in the sub-consciousness of the average man) will be one in which a natural equilibrium of equality of opportunity in the matter of earning livings will prevail, and where in consequence the naturally upward tendency of the human spirit will assert itself,

and men will spontaneously reach out towards the ideals and valuations upon which the higher life is founded. No economic determinist has ever maintained, as Dr. Ellwood implies on page 152, that the spiritual elements in life and especially those contained in moral, religious, and artistic ideals, are determined by methods of producing and distributing wealth. All that has been maintained is that freedom to earn livings under natural and healthy conditions may determine whether or not the innate moral and religious tendencies of human nature may be able to assert themselves.

And here indeed we touch upon the crux of the question. Have we sufficient faith in the original goodness of human nature, or do we only believe in original sin? The man who is still under the influence of the blighting doctrine of human depravity and has lost faith in the efficacy and persistence of the Divine spark, may well conceive of a world that can only be redeemed by external force from the hands of that Nemesis who never forgives and who makes no distinction between mistakes and sins; but sympathy and experience have assured us that the upward reaching tendency is in constant operation even in the most seemingly unpromising souls, and that only an environment of freedom is needed to permit the bursting in unexpected places into the glossy purples of high and heroic life. We are unable to suppress a feeling that a deficiency of this faith in human nature caused Dr. Ellwood to mis-read or mis-interpret some of the signs of the times. We entirely agree that "religion is the one thing which can do most to save human nature from selfishness and brutality," but we cannot reconcile with our own experience the conclusion that "the modern world is rapidly becoming extremely indifferent to the claims of religion." If it is meant that the churches are being deserted, this of course is a matter of fact and cannot be denied. But that there is more real spontaneous religious feeling in the world today than ever before, especially among the middle and upper working classes, should be obvious to every careful observer. The way of life, the secret of Jesus, which has

been well-nigh hidden for ages by the accumulated dogmas, forms, superstitions, and respectabilities underneath which it has been buried, is being re-discovered today and is expressing itself outside of the Church in sundry ways and divers manners, in mysticism, in what is called "new thought," in psychology, and even among those who are first thought of as among the "indifferents," the economic determinists who make up the socialist movement. It has been truly said, "Man is incurably religious." Religion can never die; it can only change its thought forms, and the changes now taking place are, we are convinced, from the images and thought-forms of a kind of inverted materialism to those of a more and more spiritual sort. There are indications indeed that we are witnessing the beginning of a spiritual renaissance such as has not been known in human history before, and it may be that the European Revolution instead of contradicting this hypothesis, may be interpreted as part of the movement.

Neither can we agree with Dr. Ellwood's reading of the signs of the times in the matter of social ethics. That "the modern world has become strangely indifferent as regards matters of conduct" is contradicted by the experience of all those who have spent their lives in commercial pursuits. During the last forty years the standards of integrity in manufacture and commerce have been steadily rising. Men are discovering that not only is honesty the best policy, but that friendliness and other-regardfulness pay better than their opposites; and this in spite of a competitive struggle for which our economic system is undoubtedly responsible and which tends to keep the ape and tiger alive within us. What "control" could never have accomplished, the rising standard of human values has done in reducing drunkenness; and indulgences that were permitted among the respectabilities a generation ago are now condemned by the self-generated force of a purified public opinion. In numerous directions the conviction is forced upon us that the standards by which men regulate their lives are rising, that they are becoming less sordid, and more æsthetic and

more moral. By many converging paths indeed, some of them purely secular, men are discovering the great truth that "a Divinity doth shape our ends, rough-hew them as we may."

That the real problem which Society must solve is not that of steering the human spirit along those upward paths which lead to the ultimate things that give life its highest value, but the just distribution of wealth, Dr. Ellwood evidently recognizes, and we find some significant references to "earnings" and "findings" as headings under which income may be classified; along with the admission that "one's right to findings can scarcely be considered as on the same moral and social plane as one's right to earnings." May we suggest that the only solution of the social problem (of which we ourselves are a part) that we need attempt, is to be found along the line of thought here indicated?

It may be well to realize, at all events, what is probably the truth, that the attitude of the great inarticulate mass of humanity towards the well-meant efforts of sociologists and ameliorists is that of Diogenes in his tub towards those philosophers who officiously inquired what they could do for his comfort; "One thing only," he replied, "stand out of the way that I may see the sun."—ALEX MACKENDRICK.

#### TWO NOTABLE PAMPHLETS

"The Crimes of the Minority," an address delivered by Alexander Y. Scott before the Egyptian Club of Memphis, is a forcible indictment of the "classes," fortified by a wealth of historic examples. The "Foreword" from Hon. Louis F. Post, pays a deserved compliment to the author's eloquent arraignment.

Another valuable pamphlet that comes to our desk is a second edition of the *New Political Economy*, an address by J. B. Sharpe, of Pittsburg, copies of which may be obtained of W. D. George, 307 Fourth Avenue, Pittsburg, Pa.

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#### NEWS NOTES AND PERSONALS.

EDWARD QUINCY NORTON, of Mobile, has not relaxed his efforts in the cause and has conferred with the governor of Alabama on pending bills bearing on the subject of taxation. He has interested a number of prominent men in an application of the Pingree Vacant Lot cultivation plan, pointing out that all that men need is access to land. Both the *Mobile Register* and the *Item* are friendly to measures in our direction.

It is the testimony of Peter Witt, former lieutenant of Tom L. Johnson, that the saving effected by the three cent fare on Cleveland street car lines, estimated at \$4,000,000 a year, has been all swallowed up in increased rents. Mr. Witt's testimony is valuable, for he is traction commissioner for the city.

WILLIAM ENGLISH WALLING, the well known socialist writer and author of "The Socialists and the War," believes that the close of the war will see the most extraordinary increase of graduated inheritance and income taxes and taxes on the rise in rental value of land.

ROBERT S. PHIFER, who announced his candidacy for mayor of Jackson, Miss., on a platform advocating the adoption of the Houston Plan of taxation, has been defeated at the primaries, but the educational value of his candidacy is considered worth all that it cost.

WERE the population of Greater New York evenly distributed it has been estimated that there would be sufficient room to accommodate twenty-five million people.—N. Y. *Real Estate Record and Guide*.

I BELIEVE that all persons have an equal right to the soil. The Maker of the earth has provided one home, not two homes, for each person, not two farms, but one farm for each farmer.—GERRIT SMITH.