

THE ETHICS OF DEMOCRACY.*

"What is the history of social progress but a story of successive struggles in which larger and larger opportunities for all have been wrested from more and more subtle modes of privilege for the few? What is it but a story of successive achievements for freedom over tyranny, on higher and higher planes? What is it but a story of successive triumphs for the rights of man over the rights of masters? . . . The warfare of democracy against privilege in the most subtle forms it has yet disclosed, has but just begun. Yet we may confidently believe, with the optimism of the true democrat, that this modern battle for the ethics of democracy will end, as all those which have preceded it in the history of the race have ended, in a victory for rights over privileges."

The above words, we have taken from his Introduction, give the key-note of the valuable and timely book our esteemed co worker, Mr. Louis F. Post, editor of *The Public*, has just published, and to which we accord a most sincere and hearty welcome. For it is a book that will rejoice the heart, as well as confirm the faith, of every true democrat, of every lover of social righteousness. In it not only are the ethics of democracy, the immutable and fundamental principles of social righteousness, lucidly expounded, but their direct bearing on the problems of both individual and social life are illuminatingly revealed. By their revealing light most of the questionings and problems which to-day trouble the heart and perplex the understanding of ethical minded men are searchingly examined, and their true nature and essence made clear to our mental vision. With the result that Mr. Post has given us a book which none of us can read without feeling ourselves better equipped to continue the struggle for freedom, righteousness, and justice, against tyranny, monopoly, and oppression, in which it is the privilege of democrats to take part, and which cannot cease until the victory of democracy, of social justice, shall have been secured, until, to use our author's words, "righteousness and peace shall have kissed, and the ethics of democracy shall be the acknowledged ethics of the race."

The book is dedicated to the greatest apostle of democracy, of social justice, the nineteenth century produced, the man on whose works it is avowedly based, in the following true and telling words:—"To the memory of Henry George, preceptor and friend, a philosopher who profoundly explored the principles of social life for very love of mankind, a political economist who scientifically traced economic laws to their roots in the moral law, a popular leader who quailed before no moral wrong, a devoted champion whose faith was grounded in moral right, a constructive statesman who saw in the ethics of democracy the natural laws of human progress."

The most instructive, as well as the most original, chapter in the opening books is, perhaps, the one on "Success," from which we feel impelled to quote the following, as it seems to us to contain many truths it is very necessary we should clearly understand, and at times boldly avow and proclaim—**Success!**

"By natural law success does depend upon industry; and the degree and intelligence of the industry does naturally determine the measure of the success. This would be true also in actual experience if industry were identified exclusively with rendering service. Then success would not be merely a prize for the extraordinary feats of a few, and something almost as difficult to keep as to get. It would be the reward of all, and to each according to the measure of his useful-

ness. Each would get his own earnings. But industry is not exclusively identified with rendering service. It may be devoted in a slave country to acquiring slaves; and there the successful man would be he who had acquired enough slaves to relieve him of all necessity of working. In more civilized communities it may be devoted to acquiring financial interests that are nourished by veiled systems of slavery. The principle is the same; it is only the method that differs. And just as it would be cruel mockery in a slave country to tell slaves that excessive industry would assure them business success, when in fact not they but their masters would profit by their greater activity, so it is in the country of higher civilization—indeed it is more cruel there, because more deceptive—to teach young men that success depends upon industry. It would be only the truth to teach that it depends upon monopoly."

He then continues—

"Does not every intelligent man know, and will not every genuinely honest man admit, that the industrial power of the present time centres in monopoly? True enough, monopoly may be acquired through extraordinary industry, so long as the standards of work leave a margin for extraordinary labour feats; but it is the monopoly, all the same, and not industry, that finally secures success. Monopoly is a process of levying tribute upon the industrious for the benefit of monopoly beneficiaries. When it exists, increased industry among non-monopolists cannot benefit them as a class. Some of their number may for a time by superior energy climb out of their class and become monopolists; but as soon as intensified industry becomes general, all its profits go to fatten the monopoly class and not to enrich the industrious class. . . . When the theory that industry is the true measure of success once receives full and candid consideration, the doom of monopoly will have sounded. For then it will be seen that with equal natural opportunities secured to all, with justice established and monopoly abolished, the optimistic dreams of the college graduate would come true: that without nerve strain or conscience strain all could succeed who tried to, and only those would fail who deserved to fail."

Respecting the Respectable.

Then follows a short but most instructive chapter on "Respecting the Respectable," which concludes with the following suggestive words:—

"Need it be so any longer? May we not reasonably hope that the time is near at hand when mankind will resist the temptation to respect and to inculcate respect for things that are merely respectable, and in place of this image-worship learn to respect and to teach respect for the things that are true?"

Great Fortunes.

On this subject, too, Mr. Post has something to say well worthy the careful attention of every student of ethics or of economics, and which we would cordially commend to the consideration of the numerous admirers of Mr. Carnegie or of the late Cecil Rhodes—

"No very great fortune is just. This remark does not refer to tainted fortunes alone. It refers also to those that are morally clean, so far as any act of the possessor is concerned. The allusion is to the character of the fortune, not to the character of its possessor. Specifically it is an allusion to the fact, and fact it is, that no great fortune can be accumulated or perpetuated by any man without his thereby contributing, however unintentionally or unconsciously, to the continuous impoverishment of other men. For great fortunes consist chiefly of the market value of legal powers of extortion. These fortunes certainly do not consist of money. When men speak of great accumulations of

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money, they speak in metaphor. Neither do such fortunes consist of existing wealth. . . . When, therefore, men speak of great accumulations of wealth, they also speak in metaphor. What they mean is accumulations, not of existent wealth produced in the past, but of legal power to command the possession of wealth as others bring it into existence in the present or future.

Great fortunes consist then for the most part, not of the completed products of past labour, nor of money, but of legal powers to exact tribute from present and future labour. . . . Analyzed to the last, these powers are nothing but powers of taxation for private purposes."

"Granted that anybody can get rich if he tries. Granted that nothing is needed but foresight, ingenuity, skill, industry, patience, and determination. Granted that everybody possesses or can develop those qualities to the necessary extent. . . . Granted, in a word, that what he asserts who insists that getting rich is only a matter of the will, is true. Grant it all, and still a question remains which impeaches the righteousness of every great fortune and throws a doubt upon the deservedness of poverty even in extreme cases like those of the tramp. It is the crucial question by which our religion, our morals, our civilization are to be tried. It is the test question of our social system, and these are its terms: Can anybody get rich, under existing industrial conditions, without thereby helping to make others poor?"

"There is but one answer, and that is No!"

Free Competition.

With the subject of competition, that bugbear of so many earnest, and otherwise sane, social reformers, our author deals in a manner that leaves nothing to be desired. Competition he holds to be, as someone has expressed it, "God's law of co-operation in a selfish world." After forcibly protesting against the use of words with double meanings, he clears the question from all ambiguity by indicating what in his judgment the term really denotes and involves. "Free competition," he contends, "is synonymous with free bargaining"; "free competition implies individual freedom;" and manifestly neither individual freedom nor free bargaining can exist so long as monopoly is allowed to continue. But abolish monopoly and it will be seen that "egoistic competition is, in fact, but a natural law for compelling the selfish to be fair and the unrighteous to be just."

"If all are free," he continues, "with equal access to natural and social opportunities, this competition could produce but one effect—an equilibrium of exchange at a point at which neither party to the trade gets more or gives less than is just. While it is true that parties to trade may be actuated by selfish motives in their competition, it is equally true that they may be actuated by unselfish motives, and be their motives good or bad, the net result of their competition, if they compete in freedom, is a just equilibrium of value. It is justice, not greed, to which free competition really ministers."

A conclusion which is strongly confirmed by the convulsive struggles of monopolists in all countries to free themselves and the industries and services they control from its operation, to crush out or to combine with possible competitors.

The True Work before us.

This chapter concludes with the following summary of the immediate work of the true social reformer:—

"The true work before us, then, the work that will count both in the doing and in the fruition, is to abolish monopoly and restore freedom to competition.

... If that is desirable—and really is it not the only thing worth fighting for?—then we must achieve it by making competition free. Free competition, and that alone, can secure economic freedom. Without it we have monopoly. And an economic state organized

upon monopoly principles would be intolerable, whether governed by a trust magnate, a political boss, a trades union leader, a majority of the people, or even by the most amiable altruist who ever loved his fellow men."

Imperialism and Civilization.

Of Imperialism, also, Mr. Post has something to say that it would indeed be well for the future of this country if our practical politicians could be induced to heed. Referring to the prevailing belief that by conquest and subjugation of "inferior" people by "superior" people, civilization is spread over the world, he replies—

"The great promoter of true civilization is not military conquest, nor conquest of any kind by means of force. The great promoter of civilization is trade. Not the trade that is said to follow the flag. Not the trade that consists of exporting without importing. Not any kind of strangled trade. But free trade. . . . If it is civilization that we wish to spread, if the progress of the world is our object, we have only to become universal free traders instead of imperialistic freebooters. Here is the choice: Free trade, with the olive branch of peace and the horn of general plenty; or imperialism, with the destructive implements and the demoralising influences of war.

"Which shall it be?"

As our readers will have observed, we have made no attempt to criticize this book, and that for the simple reason that its careful study has not brought us face to face with a single conclusion that we cannot unreservedly accept, or a single argument we do not believe to be valid. The reader may miss the eloquence and warmth and simplicity of diction that are such marked characteristics of Henry George's writings; but to our minds the weightiness of Mr. Post's arguments more than compensates for any shortcomings in his literary style. Hence our endeavour has been to give our readers some insight into the character of his book, in the hope that some of them will be induced to send us on an order for same. It is certainly one of the most important works explaining and elucidating the Georgian philosophy that has yet appeared; and hence we feel that no single tax library can be regarded as complete until it has been added to its shelves. It is a book which must gain many converts to the cause of economic freedom, of social righteousness, or, briefly, to the ethics of democracy.

L. H. B.

ENGLISH NEWS AND NOTES.

[All communications respecting this column should be sent to the General Secretary, English League for the Taxation of Land Values, 376 and 377 Strand, London, W.C.]

THE Central Council of the League met on Monday, January 18th, Mr. Alfred Billson, President of the League, in the chair. The General Secretary presented his quarterly review of the work of the L. a. v., and, on behalf of the Hon. Treasurer, who was unavoidably absent, submitted a statement of accounts for the half-year ended December 31st last. During this period the subscriptions amounted to £347, and the receipts from sale of literature to £412. A special vote of thanks to Mr. Berens for his great services as Hon. Treasurer during the quarter was moved by the President, and unanimously adopted. It was pointed out to the Council that while the financial position of the League was on the whole sound, and indeed satisfactory, there was still urgent need for an increased income in order to enable the Executive to meet increasing demands without anxiety. It was reported that over 27,000 copies of Henry George's "Protection or Free Trade" had been disposed of since the League undertook the re-issue of the book at 6d. net.

Reports were received from Mr. F. Skirrow, the Yorkshire agent of the League, and from Mr. R. Brown, Hon. Secy.