

"THE CITY THE HOPE OF DEMOCRACY."*

"The advances in which civilisation consists are not secured in the constitution of man, but in the constitution of society. They are thus not fixed and permanent, but may at any time be lost—nay, are constantly tending to be lost."—Henry George.

This is a book that almost seems to us as if specially written to prove the truth of the above words, to prove, to use its author's own words, that "it is not personal goodness that is required so much as public intelligence;" that "our evils are economic, not personal;" that "it is our institutions and our laws, not a divine ordinance or the inherent viciousness of mankind, that are at fault;" that "the worst of the evils under which civilised nations suffer are traceable to laws creating privileges;" and, finally, that "these evils can be largely corrected through their abolition."

Moreover, it is a book that will rejoice the soul and rekindle the enthusiasm of every social reformer, opening to them new vistas as to the possibilities of human life and human happiness now well within the reach of our race, encouraging, invigorating and well-founded hopes as to the future destinies of mankind. Many of us may have rashly come to consider town-life as almost necessarily the cradle of physical and spiritual, even if not of mental, degeneracy. It is quite excusable if to us our cities, which claim four-fifths of our population, seem as only the nurseries of misery and destitution, of unspeakable vices and crimes, as "great human warrens, crowded to suffocation, and filled with underfed human beings struggling for a place to live." It is excusable, we say, if we have come to regard the city rather as the home of exploitation, as the fortress of aristocratic privilege and monopoly, rather than as "the hope of democracy." We see it as it is, and our hearts are filled with despair. Mr. Howe, in a vigorous epigrammatic style which vivifies and illumines his clear and convincing reasoning, makes us see it as it might be—nay, as it necessarily will be if only we remain true to the highest traditions of our race—and our hearts are filled with rejoicing.

Mr. Howe's work, as he tells us, is "an attempt at the economic interpretation of the city." In it he carefully traces its evolution, lays bare the causes that increasingly tend to impel men to live in cities, shows the American city as it is, as well as the manifest causes that have made it what it is, and then carefully and convincingly indicates the means by which it may be made what it may and should be, the home and hope of Democracy. In his Preface he lucidly presents the conclusions his personal experiences and close study of municipal conditions in both America and Great Britain have forced upon him, as follows:—

"The corruption, the indifference, the incompetence of the official, and the apathy of the citizen, the disparity of wealth, the poverty, vice, crime, and disease, are due to causes economic and industrial. They are traceable to our Institutions, rather than to the depravity of human nature. Their connection is not a matter of education or the penal code. It is a matter of industrial democracy. . . . The same is true of the social problems of city life. The worst of the distressing poverty, as well as the irresponsible wealth, is traceable to economic institutions, to franchise privileges, and unwise taxation; to laws which are open to correction as they were to creation. . . . Only by exiling privileges shall we exile corruption. Only by offering opportunities to labour shall we close the doors of our hospitals, almshouses, and prisons. Only by taxing monopoly will monopoly be forced to let go its hold on the resources of the earth and the means for a livelihood."

* *The City the Hope of Democracy.* By Frederick C. Howe. Publisher: Fisher, Unwin, London. Price 7/6 net. Post free from *Land Values* Offices at published price.

Monopoly and privilege our author, like ourselves, holds to be the upas tree that is poisoning the roots and undermining the foundation of American institutions, sapping its private and corrupting its public life. It is in the city, and the city alone, that he sees any hope of social salvation, whence he sees slowly arising that social instinct, "which is willingness to struggle for the common weal and suffer for the common woe," which can alone hope to overthrow the entrenched hosts of corrupting and debauching privilege and monopoly. Nor does Mr. Howe leave his readers in ignorance as to the lines on which the inevitable struggle can alone be successfully fought out. After analysing the innumerable functions already performed by the City for the benefit of its citizens, he says:—

"What the future extension of these activities may be, cannot be anticipated. There seems, however, to be a well-defined line of demarcation between the functions that should be performed by the city, and those that should be left to private control. *That line is fixed by monopoly. Whatever is of necessity a monopoly should be a public monopoly*, especially where it offers a service of universal use. So long as the service is subject to the regulating power of competition, it should be left to private control, for monopoly and liberty cannot live together. Either monopoly will control or seek to control the city, or the city must own the monopoly."

And towards the close of his book he admirably summarises the whole position in the following telling words:—

"America is to-day struggling under a burden of monopoly charges in rent, franchise and railway privileges, and taxes on the necessities of life, unparalleled in the civilised world outside of Russia. The poor are held between the burden of unjust taxation on the one hand and monopoly on the other. . . . In the cities it is within our power to lift the burden. The extension of the activities of the city and the reduction of the cost of service on municipal monopolies will do something. But the greatest gain will come through a change in our methods of taxation and the assumption of the unearned increment of the land for public uses."

Pressure on our space forces us to close here our notice of Mr. Howe's most valuable contribution to the rapidly increasing literature on radical economic reforms. We cannot too strongly urge its claims on the attention of our readers, who will find that in it the justification and beneficial effects of the Taxation of Land Values are dealt with in a manner that leaves nothing to be desired. The book, in truth, is as a trumpet blast, calling the democracy everywhere to equip themselves for the coming struggle—nay, for the struggle that in both America and Great Britain has already commenced. L.H.B.

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