THE UNITY
OF
WESTERN CIVILIZATION

ESSAYS ARRANGED AND EDITED

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HUMPHREY MILFORD
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW NEW YORK
TORONTO MELBOURNE BOMBAY
1915

XI

COMMON IDEALS OF SOCIAL REFORM

EARLIER ages were more able than ours to believe in the good old days. We, knowing more of the past than our forefathers did, can find in it no golden age. But our eyes do not rest even upon the present. In the nineteenth century men thought they were at the end of a process, and their evolutionary creed was often only a polite method of saying what fine fellows they were. Now we look forward. The future seems to us longer than the past and more important than the present; and we ourselves seem to be at the beginning rather than at the end of time. A knowledge of the past has made it impossible to believe that growth has stopped, and we understand how different the future may be, in part at least, by perceiving how different even this grimy and blood-stained present is from the still more inhuman past.

Among the recorded changes the Economists write of an increasing interchange of goods, and we can see as well an increasing interchange of ideas across the frontiers of States. Music, painting, literature, and science have all been influenced; and ideas concerning political, economic, and social facts have been affected by that interchange which has developed our philosophy, our science, and our art. No one nation has originated all; and each nation has depended on hints and hypotheses which have arisen in others.

But the interchange of ideas on social life has led to an increase of ideals, which are plans of action emotionally appreciated and therefore motive forces. Some of these

are the Utopias of individual thinkers; but we shall consider here only those more powerful ideals which are shared, however vaguely, by many. In this case also, as in the purely intellectual sphere, the fire spreads from group to group, from nation to nation; and as the interchange of ideas increases knowledge, so the exchange of enthusiasm makes action more powerful. A really effective ideal, however, cannot arise except from the perception of definite evil. Vague discontents may cause such revolution as leads to reaction; but the clear sight of evil is the only source of reform. We may take it for granted, then, that although an ideal is nerveless if it is not passionate, it is futile unless it is based on knowledge. Therefore a hint must be given of the evils from the knowledge of which ideals of social reform now rise. That all is not well in the relations of man to man or of group to group must be fairly obvious to any one with imagination enough for sympathy. General dissatisfaction and universal cures for society are childish; but the perception of this and that evil gives rise to different plans for reform which all originate in the enthusiasm which is an ideal. We may put aside the long history of the growth of this shared enthusiasm for better relations between men, whatever their ability, their rank, their race, or their government.

The common ideals of the present are the result of a gradual development, but we shall consider them here as attempts to deal with existing evils and plans for a better future.

Some social evils of the present are perhaps as old as any settled civilization. Such are disease and personal violence. Some are due to forces which have come into existence recently, owing to increased communication and accumulated wealth. Such are extreme poverty and the

dehumanizing of social relations. With both kinds of evil we are moved to deal, and we are not deterred from the attempt to reform even long-established evil; for we feel that we do not know what is possible. Nothing is inevitable. This is not the place to give in detail the description of those evils which are being dealt with. It is enough if we recognize that it is no abstract or airy theory of equality or human nature which moves us to action. All real theories are intensely personal: and no theory has ever yet moved men unless they saw through it to the crude facts. However it may be phrased in a theory of society, we recognize it as evil that disease, leading to premature death, should be as common as it is. As a social evil it may be said to disturb seriously the relations between men. We see also that it is a social evil that men should use fraud or violence in compelling labour or in the pursuit of riches. Of the newer social evils there is the physical and spiritual deterioration which seems to result from the massing of men in great cities. There is also the dehumanizing of the relations between master and man. And this is like in kind to the dehumanizing of all functions in the vast institutions of modern times. The director of a company comes to regard himself as part of a machine; and so does the shareholder. So eventually does the agent of the State. Until at last we reach the immense evil that human action is done for which no moral responsibility is felt. How then shall we act? What has been done and what is still hoped for? The answer to such questions will be a statement of ideals.

One may speak of ideals of social reform from two different points of view; either with respect to (1) the changing sentiment which produces movements for reform or with respect to (2) the institutional change which embodies that sentiment. The two are complementary

parts of one historical movement: and it is difficult to divide them as cause and effect. For sentiment, becoming enthusiasm, certainly causes institutional change, and yet the reformed institution invariably creates a new sentiment. The province of law and of social custom is to lead as well as to register—a dynamic as well as a static influence, to increase order and to incite to liberty. In actual life, therefore, it is often impossible to separate the sentiment from its embodiment in measures of social reform.

For purposes of study, however, one may divide. We may put aside the moving sentiments—the passions, however faint, which urge men to wish for a better future—and we may consider first the particular instances of reform.

One definite and in some sense new departure in the results of the shared enthusiasms of nations has been the industrial legislation of recent years. That has been already dealt with. But, although in an economic age such as ours industrial reform may seem the most striking, it is not the only effect of our shared enthusiasm and later ages may not think it the most important. There has been reform of social evils owing to the interchange between nations of ideas on education, religious toleration, medicine, and sanitation, the treatment of criminals, the suppression of slavery and many other subjects. All these and many more reforms are, as it were, registered in institutional (legal or administrative) change.

Perhaps it is better to begin with a definite instance of the working of an ideal, lest it may seem that we are speaking only of an empty aspiration. We may take as an example the reforms connected with medicine and sanitation, and those only in so far as they have been officially established by the joint action of states. This is a very restricted embodiment of a social ideal, since of

course we may find the same use of common labour between men of different races in the private contest with disease or in the municipal preventive medicine which in every great city owes much to investigators and practitioners of other nations. But it is better to take the most tangible effect in purely governmental action.

The French Government proposed an international conference, which met in 1851, to deal with infectious disease; and a second conference met in 1856. In 1865 the outburst of cholera in the East led to a third congress at Constantinople. Great Britain opposed treaties for regulating quarantine, &c., because of the delay which might be caused to the pursuit of shipping interests. But at last a treaty was made in 1892 at Venice for protection against cholera. Further and more effective treaties were agreed to by civilized states in 1897 and 1903. A bureau of information concerning infectious disease was established at Paris, and commissions to supervise were established in Turkey and Egypt. With regard to sleeping sickness Great Britain took the initiative; and a conference met in 1907, in London, at which six countries were represented. So much with respect to disease; we may now turn to examples of the joint action of states as regards crime.

The African slave traffic has been dealt with since 1885 (Berlin Conference) by the European States acting together on certain general principles. And what is known as the White Slave traffic was the subject of arrangement between fifteen states in the conference at Paris in 1902.

Again, the reform of prisons and penitentiaries has been much assisted by international congresses since 1846. The last was held in 1910 in America, at which twenty-eight states were represented. A secretariat has been established at Berne for the exchange of expert opinion and for making suggestions to governments.

These are examples of a very numerous class of reforms undertaken by the *joint action* of governments. They are all comparatively recent and most of the twenty-eight unions between governments for concerted action have been established during the years of European peace between 1871 and 1914. In these instances the States of Europe have put their precious sovereignties into their pockets; although the lawyers and diplomatists explain the situation in the old terms.

With respect to all these movements for social reform three points must be noticed: first, the initiative in most reform has come from private enterprise and not from diplomacy or governments. Secondly, this private interest has spread from the few of one nation to the few of another before any effective result was attained. Thirdly, the states have not acted together because of any general theory of international action, but simply because certain social evils could not be dealt with at all by any state acting separately. Whatever hampers common action, then, also hinders effective reform in dealing with disease or crime. I need not elaborate the conclusion.

There are also instances of governmental action being *directly influenced* by the practice of other states, even when there has been no common action. The two most striking reforms of recent years have been in education and religious toleration. Of education enough has already been said. The interest from our point of view here is chiefly in the effect of education on social structure. It is increasingly evident that of all forces for transforming a nation, education is the most powerful; but no one nation can transform its education effectively without respect to the mistakes and successes of its neighbours. This has been perceived and acted upon. The influence, for example, of

Germany on England is sufficiently well known. German precedents were quoted in the House of Commons in the early days of state education for England: and the Education Acts of 1870 and 1876 were largely due to the impression made in England by the success of state education in Prussia. Coleridge, Carlyle, and Matthew Arnold definitely acknowledged a debt to Germany. But Germany owed something to England in the perception of the value of surroundings and corporate life in schools. France also was affected by English education; and, in fact, French educators had to come to England to find the thing for which the French gave us the name—*Esprit de Corps*.

The United States have been very definitely influenced in their University education both by Germany and England; and their Government has in primary education certainly established for all states the transforming possibilities of a school system. It must be remembered that the crudity of civilization and its apparent corruption in the United States are European not American. It is because Europe has neglected its duty, enslaved and brutalized its peoples, that social and political evil enters with the immigrants; and all this mass of European incompetence, the result of neglect or evil-doing in Ireland, Poland, the Slavonic Countries and Italy, the Government of the United States exorcises with education: and the effect is spreading beyond the frontiers of the States. A further effect of influence passing from nation to nation has been the change with regard to the relations of State and Church. In England it is some years since the State persecuted in the supposed interest of religion; but we remember that the abolition of tests against Roman Catholics was as late as 1830 and as against Jews as late as 1850. Even the most backward of European countries have been affected by the general feeling. In 1874 Austria

for the first time allowed any creed, not dangerous to morals, to be preached; and ecclesiastical power is not any longer to be used against any but members of the particular Church which is offended. In Spain there are still some obstacles to public manifestations of any religious belief but that which is most prevalent; free worship in private, however, is at last allowed. Thus, the general tendency, spreading from the nations which are most intricately divided in religion, has been towards what is called toleration. Connected with this has been the gradual recognition of civil marriage; in which the old privilege of the most powerful Church is no longer recognized by the modern State. Law and custom have both changed.

Perhaps the general attitude has not really changed. We persecute more for political than for religious unorthodoxy; or it may be that in our more economic age we forbear to burn heretics only because we cannot afford the faggots. But in any case the relations between men in society are more justly arranged, even where religion is concerned.

We have thus examples of (1) joint governmental action and (2) separate actions of governments influenced directly by foreign governments.

There are also certain results of the interchange of ideals between nations which are not yet, or only in part, registered in legal or political institutions. Such for example is the changed position given to women. A change has occurred quite outside the political or even the economic sphere, both in the habits of western humanity and in their guiding conceptions.

The change is affecting the meaning of marriage, since we are becoming inclined to suppose that man and woman are not simply male and female. Human individuality is

given a new value; and there is no telling yet what the new attitude may involve in lessening the friction due to primitive and obsolete tradition or in making society more reasonable and civilized. The source of the change is undoubtedly an enthusiasm which has been influenced by men and women of all nations. Ibsen has a place in the history of social transformation. And besides, the contact between nations has made it possible for the freer position of women in one group to affect the domestic slavery of another.

In the position of children, also, an immense change is proceeding. We cannot fail to call it social reform, that the child should be given so much more definite a place in the social organism. Aristotle thought woman was a mistake of nature's in the attempt to make man; and nearly all philosophers have treated children as if they ought to be rather ashamed of themselves for not being grown up. I speak of philosophers in the wide sense of the term, for I do not think the metaphysicians knew that there was such a thing as a child in the universe. However that may be, we can hardly believe that as late as the nineteenth century parents really imagined that they knew what was good for their children. In our more sceptical age, children have generally to be careful not to allow their parents to read certain books, and in every well brought up family, it is thought that parents should be seen and not heard. A social change has occurred in the comparative importance we assign to childhood and age.

Thirdly, there is gradually coming about a transformation of social castes. One must speak carefully; for in the West we are supposed not to have castes. There is, however, an uncomfortable feeling that society is not one, that the two cities which Plato said would divide and destroy the true city of men are now established—the

rich and the poor. I do not mean those with £3,000 a year, and those with £160 a year. It is not a question for the Exchequer. I mean that great numbers in all 'civilized' nations are ill-fed and ill-clothed from birth, and die prematurely. To perceive it is to desire action which perhaps no state can perform. But that we perceive it is something. Read the complacent rhymes of Lord Tennyson about 'freedom slowly broadening down' and then turn to contemporary literature, to Jean Richepin or John Galsworthy, and you will acknowledge that a common ideal of social reform has come into existence. We are at least restless in face of a social organization which wastes humanity during long years of peace almost as completely, though not so recklessly, as during a few months of war.

Something has been already done—English writers and English experience have given a motive power to Hungarian, Russian, Finnish, Turkish, Persian, and Indian democracy. Groups of men have claimed, for example in South America, their right to free development. And everywhere during the period of European peace the contact between nations was teaching every nation the force of its own character, while the new complexities of society were weakening the old dividing lines of caste between individuals.

In all these matters we seem to be moved by a desire for a freer social atmosphere. Whether law or administration changes or not, it is clear that most European nations have undergone in the years of peace from 1871 to 1914 considerable social changes. How far they are effective in all nations and in all classes it is very difficult for a contemporary to judge. It may be that the social structure of the decorative upper fringe or of the bedraggled hem of society is much the same as it was before communication was easy and transit rapid. But the

central body of European society is certainly changed; and, after all, between the scum and the dregs is the good soup.

Such are the changes which have been introduced into social life owing to the interdependence of nations. But we should not understand what has happened if we accepted the mere record of achievements. The future is built not only upon what we have done, but upon what we hope to do. Reforms accomplished do not make us more satisfied to endure evil not yet reformed—for always working in the achieved present is the ideal which transformed the past into what we now see.

We may turn, then, to consider some general features of the force working in social reform which is not yet achieved. And for that purpose we put aside established law and custom to consider the implied attitude.

Now that political privilege and inequality before the law are more or less removed, there is a greater concentration upon the underlying social injustice. We all accept it as good that the activities of government should not be for the benefit of the few, or that the money should not be drawn from one class. We suppose at least that there should be one law for rich and poor.

To any one with a knowledge of history this seems an immense step since small classes in every nation held political privilege, made law for others, and forced tribute from the majority. Not that all is justice and liberty. The law still, with noble impartiality, forbids both the millionaire and the pauper to steal bread. Of course it is not directed against the poor. The law never forbids the poor man to cheat the state out of more than £3,000 a year. Again, political power still depends on the social position of your cousins and your aunts. But something has been done.

We hear much more nowadays about social than about political or legal reform. That, in itself, is a sign of a change of attitude. In the revolution of 1381 the crowds came marching to London swearing, in the words of the old chronicle, that there would be no peace in the land till each and every lawyer was slain. In the revolutions of 1830 and 1848 it was 'death to the politicians'. Now—it may be that we despair of lawyers or politicians, dead or alive. In any case the attention of those in every state who are moved by enthusiasm for a better society is concentrated less upon votes and laws than upon the distribution of well-being.

Secondly, there has been a transference of enthusiasm of the religious or poetic kind from the sphere of contemplation or aloofness to that of earthly and even material action. Ideals of social reform do not any longer involve a neglect of food and clothing: we are all more and more convinced that it is idle to preach culture to a starving man, or to talk of liberty to one whose whole life is a bestial struggle for bare food and covering. I speak of normal times. In England, France, and Germany, social betterment means giving to a greater number security of bare life, upon which alone the good life can be built.

It will be seen that I imply a disagreement with the Tolstoian conception of reform; in so far as that involves a neglect of food and clothing and generally of what are called material goods. That conception is not perhaps powerful among those who deal with what is usually called social reform. It is not 'modern', and it is also dependent upon a mistaken argument in ethical theory. An unfortunate confusion made by what is called Eastern, Stoic, or Mediaeval asceticism led to the idea that because the mind is more important than the body, the body has no importance at all. But we need not deal with this theory in detail, especially as the general attitude of to-day

is opposed to it. There is undoubtedly a concentration upon the bare necessities of human life with a view to discovering how these can be shared more generally.

We are fully aware of the immense social danger in the desire for riches; but that is no objection to the desire for bread and clothing and the bare necessities of human life. And the seemingly materialistic enthusiasm which will gradually transform our semi-bestial civilization is no less poetic or religious than any Eastern aloofness or Tolstoian simplicity. Poetry is not all rhyming couplets: religion is not all for the intellectually or artistically incompetent. So, a world in which twenty per cent. of humanity did not slowly starve to death would not necessarily be less worthy of admiration. Nor would religion disappear if every one were healthy, unless religion means the result of neurasthenia or dyspepsia or premature ageing. No doubt there is some exaggeration in this element of the common social ideals. Not even a poor man lives on bread alone; and it is indeed possible to have a perfectly well-fed society which would be quite barbarous. But we must regard the fine flower of culture as purchased at too high a price if, for the sake of a few connoisseurs and courtiers not to say bourgeois plutocrats, the majority in every nation must lack a bare human life. Some declare that the division between nations is more important than that between the rich and the poor. It may be so; but the only reason must be that what the few have, the many, however dimly, may hope to share or may be induced to think they do share. Humanity is infinitely gullible. But in every nation there is rising a murmur which may yet become an articulate cry.

The writers of modern Utopias in their detailed conception of what is desirable may speak only for themselves; but it is a sign of the common enthusiasm that they all attach so much importance to organization

and to physical health. This indicates that we all, in every nation, look forward, however vaguely, to a society in which human life shall be less difficult for the majority to obtain. We speak sometimes of the redistribution of leisure—August Bebel made it one of the chief articles of his creed. But this as an ideal does not indicate any desire that the dock-labourer should have time to loaf in a club, or his wife time to play bridge, except in so far as time to loaf is an opportunity for some other employment than the mere struggle for food. There is nothing inevitable in a situation which makes the development of most of the human faculties a privilege of a few and an impossibility for the greater number. Nor is it correct to suppose that the half-starved and the ill-clothed should be satisfied with being 'virtuous', and leave it to others, possibly wicked and certainly far from simple, to cultivate art and science.

Nor again is it absurd to hope for a world in which all should have at least the opportunity for the development of any faculties they may possess. The social gain would be immense. It would be like the change from a harmony which is produced by a few amateurs to one of a full orchestra.

Thirdly, it is increasingly evident that no one state or nation can act effectively in social reform unless it acts in concert with others. Treaties of commerce, common prison legislation, and common measures for sanitation and medicine have proved effective because they are in the nature of things. They are necessary means for the desired prosperity even of the most selfish and segregated state.

But ignorance and prejudice and irrational violence spread as easily as disease or crime. Knowledge is not secure until it is widespread; and civilization perishes, which is segregated in a world of barbarism. Therefore

education also, in its widest sense, must be contrived in common. Not merely school systems influenced by foreign ideas, but the very atmosphere of thought must change in harmony among all nations, if we are not to go toppling down into the abyss from which by painful centuries we have ascended.

This ideal of social reform then seems to be agreed upon between some men of all nations, that more common action should be taken. It is not a vague sentiment for the abolition of conflict between states ; nor is it a pious aspiration for peace. It is the clear perception that the state cannot fulfil its functions in modern life if it continues to act as isolated or segregated. That for which the state itself stands cannot be attained even within the frontiers of one state by any state acting alone.

This is not the place to distinguish those subjects upon which states should act together from those on which they should act separately. That is simply the problem as to the limits of political regionalism. The fact which is sufficient for our argument here is that certain forces, chiefly economic, have come into existence in recent years, which disregard state boundaries. In concrete terms, these are international trusts and international labour interests. But it is increasingly evident that these cannot be effectively dealt with by any one state acting separately. The isolated sovereign state of earlier times is simply helpless before the elaborate world-system of economics ; and control can only be secured by an established world-system of politics. The states, one supposes, exist for justice and liberty. Divided, they will perish or become mere playthings in the hands of non-moral economic ' interests '.

To save itself and all it stands for, the state must cease to pose as a possible opponent to any other state, and

must deliberately co-operate in an increasing number of reforms.

It is better to put into the coldest terms a conception which has too often hitherto proved futile, because it arose rather from vague discontent, than from the perception of a definite evil. The fire of enthusiasm must indeed work upon that conception before any effective change can be made in the attitude of governments or of peoples. But enthusiasm will be wasted if we cannot pause to see against what we are contending.

We are struggling with the greatest of all obstacles to social reform when we attack the isolation of nations. Unless that is overcome we shall perhaps patch and prop ; but, time and again, we shall be enslaved to the immensely powerful non-moral forces, in the midst of which humanity finds its way. I cannot speak more clearly—*βοῦς ἐπὶ γλώσσῃ*. The nations face each other in conflict, while death, disease, violence, bestial indolence and docility corrode every state.

But when war was at its brutish worst Grotius spoke with effect of a moral bond which survived between men who in physical conflict had been trying to take their ' enemies ' for beasts and stones. And humanity began once more its long struggle with the beast in man. So now—I leave it to your imagination.

We have made immense progress by assisting each other across the frontiers of states in such science as may provide high explosive and submarine warfare. In these the nations have co-operated. The guns which kill the English at the Dardanelles were made by Englishmen. There may yet come a time when high explosives will be out of date, and the state will use the careful dissemination of disease among its enemies. The only reason, I think, why it is not now done, is that no group can be certain of

making itself immune from the disease it may spread among its enemies.

Our conclusion, therefore, is that one of the elements in the present attitude towards social reform is a tendency to co-operation between nations. We have seen that this has already had effect in various details of law and administration; and there is every reason to suppose that the method will be carried further.

But the problem cannot be left there. Co-operation as a word is a mere charm, like Evolution. There has been, and there may be co-operation in doing wrong. That action has become common does not prove that it is right; and an ideal implies at least some ethical judgement. Therefore, in every nation there are some few who are convinced of the necessity for more deliberately moral action in common between men of different races. If there can be so much co-operation in the making of armaments or the defrauding of shareholders, there may yet be more co-operation in the elimination of disease and poverty. And not only may there be such co-operation, but it must be. The situation no longer exists in which most of the effects of an evil régime are confined within frontiers. The social distress of European nations must be dealt with as a whole because it is a whole. Therefore whatever militates against the unity of western civilization destroys the possibility of social reform.

Many times before it has been seen that there are nobler conflicts than the struggle for markets or for the political domination of one clique or one nation. Many times before it has been felt, at least by a few, that man is deceived when he imagines that man is his enemy. And many times when the deliverance seemed near we have been enslaved again by an evil magic. A hundred years ago, at the end of the Napoleonic wars, the dreamers

imagined that humanity would have done with its false prophets and lay the ghosts which have haunted it since it began to shake off the manners of the beasts. But a dismal succession of new falsehoods and new blind guides appeared. And now, in this so advanced age, we have to face the same possibility. There is much to excuse a despair; from which nothing can free us but a new enthusiasm. The evil magic must be overcome by magic of another kind, and how acute the crisis seems it is hardly possible to indicate.

The quality of our age was its expectancy. For that reason men of every nation were moved to desire a transformed society. But perhaps that quality of expectancy was the quality of youth. For the first time in history, in the early twentieth century, age was giving place to youth in the political equilibrium of the generations. Now—I dare not speak too plainly. The young men of the western world are already, since August 1914, noticeably fewer. Death may have made no difference to them. It has made an immense difference to the future. It means that the eager expectancy of youth, which is the source of so much enthusiasm for a better world, is being lost. The crisis is here. As yet the common ideals of civilized nations still survive; but the desire for a better future is at ebb and flow with a tired acquiescence in the established order. It is in our hands to decide which shall overcome. No generation has faced a greater issue. We cannot tell what will be the outcome; but to hope too much is at least a more generous fault than to despair too soon.

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