THE DIRECTION OF SOCIAL REFORM.

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With the classification of Sociology as a department of Biology, an important change has been wrought in the common view of the nature and mode of growth of society. The "social body" is regarded as, in some sense, an organism developed under varying conditions from pre-existent forms. It is now recognized that social progress consists in a continual readaptation to changed and changing environment, the nature of which is such as to produce a more complex structure, or an organism of higher order. The nature of the institutions of a people depends, as is now well understood, on the character of the people, on climate, mode of life, and a score of lesser influences.

The changes of conditions, or environment, which hitherto have induced changes in the social structure, have been in the main spontaneous. They have not, generally speaking, been the result of a preconceived purpose on the part of men to attain an ideal. Whatever changes men have made have been, so to speak, remedial rather than formative; to meet present exigencies rather than to construct a new social fabric. The result of human action has been to put experience into laws, which roughly mark the boundaries of civilization rather than constitute its expansive force. In short, "blind evolution" has been the chief motive power of change. As, however, knowledge of the laws underlying human life in society increases, it should become more and more possible for men to guide these laws for the accomplishment of a preconceived purpose; so to change the conditions under which they operate as to direct their movement to the attainment of an ideal.

Social and economic conditions have come to be, in a large and an increasing degree, under human control. The change

of the environment is no longer the result of forces wholly unregulated by human action, but of forces working under conditions imposed by the will of man. In the one set of circumstances, social problems worked themselves out under the law of survival of the fittest; in the other, they are worked out by the establishment of conditions which will evolve, or create, the life or organism which is deemed to be the fittest. They formerly fought themselves out, now they may be thought out. That is to say, *reform* is added to spontaneous evolution as a means of social progress. But reform is itself evolutionary It is but evolution under guidance. The spontaneous evolution is purposeless, at least so far as man is concerned; reform is purposeful. One is unconscious; the other, conscious. Yet both are evolution. For man cannot prevent the operation of natural laws. He can only guide, control, direct them. All his efforts to consummate his purpose must be under their operation. The laws themselves remain, but the conditions under which they operate may change or be changed, so as to produce different results. This is a general truth. It is true in physics as well as in sociology. The electric current which under one set of conditions turns machinery, under another gives us light. It is the same current, generated and flowing under the operation of the same laws, but through a different medium. So the sociologist, or the practical economist, may so adjust the conditions of taxation, for example, as to produce very varied social results. Yet the same general laws directing the "incidence of taxation" will still operate. Taxation, like any other force, follows the line of least resistance. "Taxation may create monopolies or it may prevent them; it may diffuse wealth or it may concentrate it; it may promote liberty and equality of right or it may tend to the establishment of tyranny and despotism; it may be used to bring about reforms or it may be so laid as to aggravate existing grievances and foster dissension and hatred between classes; taxation may be so contrived by the skilful hand as to give free scope to every opportunity for the creation of wealth or for the advancement of all true interests of states and cities, or it

may be so shaped as to place a dead weight on a community in the race for industrial supremacy."*

At this point, as it seems, practical economists and social reformers are in danger of making two mistakes. In the first place, the language used to deny economic perpetualism and cosmopolitanism seems, in some instances, rather strong. The idea has at times been conveyed that economic *laws* are variable; that the laws *underlying* the economic and social development of one time or nation, are different from those by which the life of another time or nation has been moulded. But this, surely, is a false view. Economic laws, properly considered, are "natural laws" or laws of nature, for they are expressive of relations of cause and effect. Given the same economic or social conditions, the same results must follow. Such are the "laws" of physics, of chemistry, and of every other science. The law of gravitation tells us that a body is attracted to the earth with a force that varies as the mass and the inverse square of the distance. The fact that a body of given dimensions has a different weight at the sea-level on the equator from what it has on the same level at the poles, does not prove the law false or inoperative. Other factors have entered the problem. It is the same law acting under different conditions—the law constant and universal, the media through which it operates, variable, temporary or local. So of economic and social laws. They are as truly "natural" as the laws of physics in their universality of time and place. But national characteristics and institutions differ; geographical, climatic, and natural industrial opportunities and conditions differ. And so the same laws work out different results. There are "diversities of operations," but the same laws.

The other mistake, which is really a corollary of this one, consists in the application of empirical plans for the cure of social ills. Two features of the present period will strike the future historian with astonishment. One is the great number of schemes proposed for social reform; the other, the large number of intelligent and educated people who believe in one

*Ely: Taxation in American States and Cities, p. 55.

or another of them. The wrecks of these schemes strew the world's pathway for more than a generation, though most of them contain some of the elements necessary to success. The very fact of their conception and existence, the very fact that they have been so earnestly believed in by so many intelligent people, emphasizes the fact of the existence of a social question more than could be done by any recital of its causes or its details.

On the other hand, the fact that so many of these schemes have been shattered on the hard rocks of real life is the best of evidence that they did not conform to the conditions of social growth. It is not enough for successful reform that wrong exists. It is not enough that the wrong is recognized, or that plans are made for its removal or its cure. The plans themselves must be framed in conformity with the laws of social growth if it is desired to construct them so as to insure success. To do so requires the scientific consideration of the mode of development of social life. Reform must learn from evolution. Present conditions are not absolute. Society is a growth, its life, a continuity. The present depends on the past, is conditioned by the past. Any new institution, then, must have a vital historical connection with those already existing. To attempt to introduce one under any other circumstances would be like trying to set a house on a new foundation without regard to the size, shape or strength of the foundation.

The inevitable result of any such attempt is to produce social jars, discontent, and wrong. This is not mere theory. It has been proved in history again and again. One of the most notable instances is the settling of the English legal and land-tenure systems on India. The law of Hindoo society is so unlike that of England that it could not, so to speak, be squeezed into the English legal framework without great injustice and distress. It is too vague to conform to English strict legal formulas. Sir Henry Maine says, on this subject: "There is no doubt that the establishment of a tribunal on similar principles [as the English courts] would now-a-days be regarded as a measure of the utmost injustice and danger."*

* Village Communities, p. 37.

Maine recalls Macaulay's description, in his essay on Warren Hastings, of the consternation caused in India by the introduction of the English courts. The injustice in the case described by Macaulay was not that the prisoner did not have a fair trial from the point of view of English law; it was that "the introduction of the law under which he suffered was felt as a general grievance."

The historical explanation of the friction was that in India law had not yet become differentiated from religion, certainly not to the same extent as in England. English legal development was far in advance.

As to the system of land tenure, the English, being accustomed to large estates and great landlords, made the mistake of supposing that the same must exist in India. Neglecting the actual historical conditions they instituted such a system, conferring the large estates on tax gatherers, or "zemindars," as the class most nearly corresponding to the English landlords. The purpose was to put an end to the irregular exactions to which the peasants had long been subjected. The opportunity to establish a system "worthy to be ranked among the noblest that were ever taken for the improvement of any country" was blindly thrown away. The measure adopted proved a total failure, in its main feature. Its promoters were unaccustomed to allow for modification in the operation of new institutions under the influence of pre-existing conditions.

Similar results followed the attempt of our own forefathers to impose their systems of law and morals on the Indians.*

This same lack of adaption of the new to the old institutions is the reason that so many laws are unenforced. To be effective, a law must express the opinions of a majority, at least, of the people. Law can never be far in advance of public opinion, if it is to be enforced. It may be somewhat in advance; and it must be so, if it is to be a means of education. But it cannot serve this purpose unless it is expressive of the opinion of at least a respectable minority.

Any new system, whether legal, social, economic or political, must have reference, in the first place, to the character of

*See Weeden's Economic History of N. E., Vol. I, p. 27 ff.; also II, pp. 715 and 728.

the people. Our forefathers showed their character in their refusal to submit to taxation without representation. "Our Indian subjects," said Macaulay, "submit patiently to a salt monopoly. We tried a stamp duty—a tax so light as scarcely to be felt—on the fierce breed of the old puritans, and we lost an Empire." Bagehot had this same truth in mind when, after pointing out certain faults in our political system, he explained its working success by remarking that the American people could run any system. There are not many peoples of whom this would be true. For example, an attempt to govern Turkey by the American Constitutional system would invite only ridiculous failure. There are races which, at least so far in their development, seem incapable of self-government. Certainly no other people shows such a capacity for it as the Anglo-Saxons. The frequent convulsions which have taken place among the Latin peoples suggest the inquiry whether they have the faculty in any eminent degree. The legislators of even republican France come dangerously near making government a farce.

But even if we grant that all people have, or may develop, a sufficient character for self-government, their stage of development may render them incapable of it at the selected time. This suggests the second condition which schemes of reform must observe: They must be adapted to the stage of development reached by the people. This lack of equality of development was doubtless the cause of the hardships produced in India by the introduction of the English legal system, as noted above. To the same cause was probably due, in part, the ruin and distress, "for which no parallel can be found in the annals of commerce,"* that followed the introduction of the English system of manufacturers into India. The necessity of observing this condition of reform is also the explanation of the ill-success of attempts at revolution in Russia. The mass of the people is not yet educated up to the plane of self-government and the existing tyranny will endure until the majority of the Russian people are sufficiently developed to appreciate a better system; and the successful introduction of any better system will be

* Bentinck.

impossible until then. It wouldn't *work*. For institutions do not run themselves. They require the vital personality of a people behind them and within them. "A nation cannot leap several centuries of development." If it could, it would be possible to construct a state artificially. But no form of state has ever artificially existed, and none can so exist.

To say that in reform regard must be had to the stage of development, is to emphasize the importance of the average general education. There always is, in a country, a small number of people in advance of the rest. The masses cannot go as fast as the thinking portion of the community. But development, or progress, must wait on the body of the people. A new régime must be on the intellectual level of the people in general, if it is to be accepted and successful. It is for some such reason as this that the purity of the ballot has deteriorated in some places. The voters are not sufficiently educated to understand its value and importance. Similarly, it is claimed, the negroes in some sections of the south, have so little correct conception of their political rights and duties, that they are incapable of self-government; and our political institutions, left to management like theirs, would soon go to ruin.

Again, new institutions must be in the line with the historical development of a people. At present we in this country are having Germany held up to us as, in many respects, an institutional model. We hear of the "model city" of Berlin. We are told of its excellent municipal administration, and have the government of our own cities held up in contrast. This contrast is, indeed, both real and painfully impressive. But it would be rash to conclude that the Berlin system could be successful in London or New York, or even in Boston. Its successful introduction would require a change not only in the temper of our people, but, what amounts to the same thing, in the spirit of our institutions. Americans and Englishmen would not submit to what seems to us like the excess of bureaucratic or administrative authority. The docile German spirit of respect for "the powers that be," is lacking. "We are more tenacious of our political rights than observant of our political duties." This is, in some respects, a vicious spirit, but it is

the spirit that has won us our liberties. It is true, indeed, that our liberties are now so secure that probably no extension of administration could affect them. And, moreover, the social and industrial conditions of the more advanced nations are becoming more and more alike. But we are yet far from the stage of identity.

Moreover, supposing it is in keeping with the character, education, and development of the people, a new institution requires for its successful operation time to adjust itself to its surroundings. Institutions, like nations, cannot be built in a day. Haste here makes not only waste but hardship and suffering. One of the best illustrations of this need of time for adjustment, is furnished by the history of internal taxation in our Civil War. The system was novel to our institutions, and the time required for it to get into complete touch with the life of the people was such that, being imposed some time after the beginning of the war, it yielded little help compared with what it might have afforded if established two or three years earlier. "The system of internal duties then established did not get well under way till late in 1863. The revenue from this source amounted for the four years *after* the close of the war, to over three times what it did for the four preceding years." * There is no doubt that the largest influence producing this result was the one indicated.

We cannot, then, successfully impose ready-made institutions on society. Any attempt to do so will result only in the ruin of the institutions and in great hardship to the people.

Not only must new institutions have relation to those already in existence, but they must be made to evolve from our old. But we "cannot evolve what has not first been involved." We must, then, to construct intelligently, study the nature of society. We must learn the manner of its growth.

It is the testimony of history that social growth is not equable. Society, in a given period, as a generation, or a century, develops more rapidly along some lines than along others. Progress is unsymmetrical, disjointed. Not all departments of activity move forward at the same rate. Having

* H. C. Adams: Public Debts, page 84.

advanced to a higher plane in one department, mankind must pause there to bring the others up to the same, or rather a harmonious, level. It is this fact which contains the truth expressed in the common remark that each nation and generation has its special mission. This same fact is illustrated by the progress of civilization in the last few centuries. The economic conditions existing under the Feudal System were well adapted to the social and religious situation. When progress began, it was not along all lines at once. It took the form of religious change. The most palpable and immediate result was not primarily a reform of ethics, or of religion itself. Speaking broadly, the movement was simply an attempt to secure individual independence of thought in theological matters. It was an emphasis of the importance of the individual. Strictly, of course, the individualism at the basis of modern industrial society did not begin with the Reformation. It is largely an inheritance from Stoicism. Perfection of character and superiority to social turmoil was the aim of the Stoic. But this, in its truest meaning, was too high for the Stoic to attain. He sought it in self-renunciation, by withdrawal from social duties, not by absorption in them. His perfection came apart from them, and not through their noble discharge. This was really a refined intellectual selfishness, the influence of which waned only before that of Christianity and its purer altruism. But it did not entirely disappear. It received a new emphasis from the Reformation. The result was a breaking up of class dependence. Through its influence on the doctrine of Natural Liberty, this reassertion of the importance of the individual revolutionized the political side of society, finding its expression here in the American and the French Revolutions.

Religious and political freedom thus secured, the next great change was industrial. Industrial progress has been the main line of advance in the last half century, and it has run beyond the limits of harmonious adjustment with the legal and ethical conceptions that were developed before it. Hence it is that there is a shock, or a series of shocks, in the social body. This is but the jarring that arises from its efforts to adjust itself

harmoniously to its new environment. Harmony is to be restored only when the same relative degree of progress is attained by all departments of society. For the functions of the organs of the social body are interdependent, and their healthy action goes on only when they are tuned, so to speak, to the same pitch. Otherwise "beats" are inevitable. Accordingly, most of the social and industrial evils at present experienced are due to the fact that industrial development has outrun the juridical, the social, and the practical ethical arrangements of society. "The source of present complaint is found in the fact that the conception of the rights and duties, of liberties and constraints, of privileges and responsibilities, which lies at the basis of our juridical system, is not applied to the highly developed industrial system of the present. Difficulties have arisen because the industrial life and activity of the social organism have grown to a different plane from the one which underlies the juridical system." * The rapidity of the industrial change and the emphasis of the social side of production have so changed the relations between employers and employed that old ideas of justice between the classes have been upset.

The great structure of society rises little by little, now this corner, now that, until at length harmony of level is attained, or rather approximated. For no organ of society can be regarded as strictly quiescent while others are growing up to it. At no period of history, certainly not of the history of the progressive races, has such a period of rest, or quietude, or social harmony, ever been attained. Social forces are never at rest, never at a quiet level, never in stable equilibrium. No sooner has the restoration of the disturbed equilibrium been secured, than the social life reaches out further in some line of its activity, and the series of jars and shocks and readjustments begins anew.

Considerations like the the foregoing make *a priori* schemes of social reform justly open to suspicion, and furnish safe, even though rough, data of the mode in which progress should be made. They enable us to gauge approximately the claims to consideration of many plans now presented. We can endorse

* Science Economic Discussions, page 88.

only those which are comformable both to the direction and stage of a nation's development, and to the character and education of its people; those which may be fitted gradually to existing circumstances, and conform to the laws of social evolution. All that man can do to bring about a new regime, is to change social and economic environment, and not to devise schemes that run counter to social and economic laws.

Viewed in the light of these truths the plans of the socialists, despite their apparent spread, do not bear much promise of ultimate success. Altogether aside from the economic fallacies involved in their proposals, it is clear that they offer a scheme that is impracticable because artificial and unevolutionary.

The scheme of the socialist is not in the line of our historical development. For our tendency has been, and is, towards eliciting the most richly diversified individualism by assuring to each the rewards of his own exertions. But even if Socialism or Nationalism were in the line of our historical development, we have not arrived at the proper stage for its introduction; for it presupposes a state of ethical culture far beyond what we have reached. Nor is the scheme of the socialist in keeping with our national character; for, as already pointed out, we are too tenacious of our personal rights. It is possible, of course, for national character to be changed. But the process must be a slow one, and it can hardly be claimed that ours is changing in a socialistic direction.

The socialists look with satisfaction on the present tendency towards great aggregations of capital in trusts and pools, regarding this as a step towards the realization of their ideals. But this is not a socialistic evolution. It is an intensification of the principal of individualism in industry, an emphasis of its despotic nature. Great combinations of capital are successful only because management and responsibility are concentrated, not diffused. If it could be shown that as pools and trusts are formed, responsibility for their management is divided among the units composing them, this would prove the possibility of general democracy in industry, and be favorable to Socialism. The truth is that Socialism underrates the difficulty of business enterprise.

Socialists also mistake the present social need. Their cry is for a new industrial organization. But, as already pointed out, our present industrial system is the latest and most advanced development of the social organism. It has outstripped other social organs in the race of progress. This is the true explanation of the present disturbance. But we cannot properly call the industrial change the *cause*. It is a symptom. It is at once the result and the sign of progress. Therefore, to attempt a reorganization or a reform of the industrial system, would be to begin at the wrong end. It is not a proper statement of the situation, from the historical and sociological point of view, to say that our present industrial system involves great evils and therefore needs to be changed; but rather, that in the long struggle of social progress, the ethical and juridical functions of the social organism have not yet developed to the extent of the industrial.

This is not to deny that there are evils in the present system of industry. It is to deny that these evils inhere wholly, or mainly, in the system. It is to claim that under different ethical conditions, the evils could be made largely to disappear. Nor is this position a denial of the possibility and desirability of a better system, even under other present conditions. "Whilst, however, an organization of the industrial world may with certainty be expected to arise in process of time, it would be a great error to attempt to improvise one."* Moreover, the establishment of a system perfect from the industrial standpoint alone, would by no means do away with social ills. To draw the industrial system away from the other departments of social life to a still higher plane, would simply increase the strain on the bonds that hold society together. The overdevelopment of one organ to the neglect of others can never produce either a normal man or a normal society.

The fact is that it is in the elevation of practical ethics that we must look for the remedy of most of our present social ills. The industrial evils are not a first cause. They are themselves the result of relatively slow moral and legal progress. And it is to the acceleration of this progress that we must give our

* Ingram's Hist. Pol. Econ., p. 244.

best efforts. We need a higher practical morality, a higher conception of social duty, and juridical conceptions and definitions more in accord with modern conditions. "Our ruling powers have still an equivocal character; they are not in real harmony with industrial life, and are in all respects imperfectly imbued with the modern spirit. What is now most urgent is not legislative interference on any large scale with the industrial relations, but the formation in both the higher and lower regions of the industrial world, of profound convictions as to social duties, and some more effective mode than at present exists of diffusing, maintaining, and applying those convictions."*

Moral force is not, indeed, new in the field of economics. It is an old agent. The increasing extent of its field of operations is new, however. The growing complexity of economic relations has been accompanied by an increasing amount of moral force in actual operation, but not an amount increasing in proportion to the growing needs of the new conditions.

The growing tendency to seek state intervention is an attempt to supply the lack of this moral force. But the attempt confuses the sphere of church and state. It implies a belief that the faults of human character cannot be eradicated, and so must be continuously checked, repressed, crushed, by external authority. The trouble with the method is that the controlling authority itself has the same faults as have its subjects, and that the faults cannot be so held in check. This method does not remedy defects of human character; nor does it do away with temptations to their activity; it only seeks to surround them with legal and conventional barriers. It is true, indeed, that change of industrial environment may have an elevating effect on morals. Amidst the wrecks of profit-sharing and co-operative schemes, for example, there are some that testify to the evolution, as a result of the industrial change, of higher ethical conceptions among those engaged in them. But such means are partial and transitory. A highly moral organization is impossible if the elements composing it are not themselves moral. As Spencer says, "The belief that faulty

* Ingram, *Ibid.*

character can so organize itself socially as to get out of itself a conduct which is not proportionately faulty, is an utterly baseless belief."*

It is not in political, legal, or industrial conditions, then, that we must seek the ultimate change. We do need a new distribution of work as between the state and private individuals, in some particulars, and we need a purification of our political life, an uplifting of our political morality. But that new distribution and that purification will be results, not causes, of a better moral life. We do need a better adaptation of our juridical, or legal, system, to modern industrial conditions. But that adaptation will come only as a result of a perception of the essential injustice of the present system. And that perception, too, will be the result of the nobler altruism of a better moral life. In short, any social reform can be permanent only as it develops individual character, and it is toward the improvement of this that our main efforts must be directed in the future as in the past.

True, in the long meanwhile that must elapse before the harmonious adjustment of the various departments of social life to the highest ethical standard can be attained, our duty is imperative to seek by every legitimate though temporary means, to lessen the jarring, the injustice, the suffering that the existing ill-adjustment produces. To erect barriers against injustice until we can remove its cause and prevent its recurrence; to repress evil until the conditions of life come to be such as of themselves to reduce it to its uneliminable minimum; to change, even arbitrarily if necessary, existing juridical misconceptions and defects, until the environment of essential justice on which the system is founded shall have had time to evolve a "fitter" structure; to remedy, here and there, faults of the existing industrial system at the same time that we work to evolve an entirely new and better one; in short, to treat the social body directly for its specific ills even while we seek to bring it as a whole to a state of good health: these are duties incumbent on the social reformer and the philanthropist in the present, none the less because he is at the same time working

* Study of Sociology, p. 22.

for the evolution of a system which by its nature will render such evils impossible, if, indeed, such a system can be found. But it will be only when perfect justice and love between man and man become spontaneous that there can come the "reformation for which the civilized world groans and travails," and which will not be an isolated fact, but a revolution that will affect every department of society, modifying our whole socia life, and elevating the whole plane of human conduct.