

A RETROSPECT FROM THE YEAR 2000

Many years ago in one of our leading magazines a series of articles appeared in the form of a discussion between John Beattie Crozier and H. G. Wells on the question as to whether a science of society is possible. Mr Crozier argued affirmatively that such a science is not only possible but necessary, and may be built upon a few obvious postulates, such as disciples of Henry George would readily assent to. Mr Wells, on the other hand, maintained that because of the unpredictability of men's actions and the uncertainty attending future changes in the climate of opinion, no principles that may properly be called scientific can be laid down; and that therefore the best we can do is to dream dreams and see visions of what a perfected society ought to resemble, and work our way to such ideals as rapidly as may be possible. If memory serves us aright it was about this time that *A Modern Utopia* was published.

Since that forgotten date the dreamers and visionaries have not been idle, though the spirit of the age has favoured the view supported by Crozier. *News from Nowhere* and *Looking Backward* are still read with avidity

and the human imagination still insists upon projecting itself into the future and painting pictures of "things as they ought to be." So long, however, as those flights of imagination are along the lines followed in *The Story of My Dictatorship* and by Mr Henry Ware Allen in his little book *Prosperity** we shall have no occasion to quarrel. The sub-title reads "Achieved by democratic steps" and these words at once arrest our attention.

The book takes the form of a series of conversations carried on from day to day between a grandfather of 85 and a grandson of 17 years respectively. These talks are supposed to take place in the year 2000, and the scene is laid in the transfigured City of Chicago which has now become as nearly as possible an Earthly Paradise. Even its physical features have been transformed. The stockyards and packing-house districts have been removed to many miles outside the city's precincts, and the city itself has been rebuilt in strict accordance with the approved principles of town-planning. Not only have æsthetic considerations obviously governed the process of rebuilding, but by the aid of science every building in the city is "air-conditioned" so as to provide uniform temperatures in summer and winter, and smoke has been entirely eliminated. But the chief change in the aspect of the regenerated city is to be found in the altered relations between its citizens. The violent contrasts between wealth and poverty have disappeared. There are no unemployed, no unmerited poverty, no slums; charitable institutions and police offices have been reduced to the skeleton proportions required; the old order has been abolished and the new is on its trial.

This is Mr Allen's dream, and what interests us in it is that he conceives of the great change having taken place solely as the result of a complete turn-over of opinion in the middle of the previous century in favour of the single tax on land values. No paternalism on the part of authorities is assumed. Every step in the process of regeneration has been democratic—spontaneous—in a word, Natural. The curiosity of the boy concerning the bad old days he has heard of, is satisfied by the prolonged explanations of the grandfather who obviously enjoys the telling of his story. The book should be an excellent one for putting in the hands of young people whose imaginations need stimulation.

ALEX MACKENDRICK.