

Mr. Nock Points Out the 'Elite'

Liberals have so popularized the notion that the term "élite" is "Paretian"—although they never quote Wilfredo Pareto or otherwise indicate more than a cursory acquaintance, at that second-hand, with the sociologist's writings—that the word has come to be suspect. Those who spread this idea have identified an "élite" in the public mind as a sort of intellectual hierarchy within the ruling classes, as a sort of "brain trust" of the privileged groups in power.

Albert Jay Nock, in his interesting critical essay, "Henry George"—(Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 32 East 29th Street, New York, \$1)—refers to his notion of an "educable élite," a notion discussed in several of his writings. Francis Neilson, author of "Man at the Crossroads," and collaborator with Mr. Nock in the editorship of the old Freeman, in discussing Mr. Nock's essay in the September issue of *The Freeman*, called attention to the term and referred to the misuse of it that has become common in popular speech and writing.

Mr. Neilson, it will be recalled, wrote:

"The meaning is clear to me, although I think the word 'élite' is not

well-chosen. I also think it was bound to raise a false notion in the mind of the reader. Surely Mr. Nock means, when he uses the word 'élite,' the few profound thinkers who may come from any class of society. It is not to be confounded with social distinction of any kind, but only in the case of quality of mind."

Mr. Neilson went on to admit that relatively few persons were willing to prepare themselves to influence their times but said that in Georgist ranks, we find "most extraordinary examples of poorly-educated men working hard for small pay, making an effort to understand George's philosophy and becoming master-instructors and crusaders." This he explained by the fact that George's gospel "appeals to all that is finest in the nature of man."

In response to this Mr. Nock has sent in the following note.—The Editor.

By Albert Jay Nock

I am sorry I can see no ground for complaint against my use of the term "educable elite" in my recently-published essay on Henry George. The philology of the term, the

Century Dictionary, and the Concise Oxford Dictionary, all agree beyond peradventure that it is extremely good use, apparently the best use one could make. The Century's definition is "a choice or select body," which precisely describes what I had in mind. If Mr. Neilson's "poorly-educated men, working for small pay, etc.," do not on his own showing constitute a choice or select body, if they are not on his own showing members of an educable elite, I am at an utter loss to describe them. Mr. Neilson is a person whom everybody respects, and I am therefore unfeignedly astonished at his saying in this connexion that my term "will not in any way fit in with our ideas." I should say, again on his own showing, that it is the one term which does most exactly fit in with them. If I could be shown that it is not, I should feel the greatest regret at having used it. As the case stands, however, I think that if there be any blame going, it should rest on the philology of the English language, rather than on me.