

CHAPTER XXXIV

CONCLUSION

1. **Individual Interests and Social Control.**—This survey of the field of social science, broad and intricate as that field is, is intended not so much to indicate final conclusions as to furnish an aid to the understanding of fundamental social laws and principles in the light of which the intelligent citizen may form his own conclusions with reference to the great public problems which confront him and which demand the intelligent and scientific analysis of every mature member of the social organization in order that social development may be intelligently directed along the line of genuine progress.

However fully the underlying laws and principles may be understood by the different members of society, it does not follow that identical conclusions will be reached with reference to specific problems. No two of us are alike in our mental and spiritual equipment, and we react very differently to the same body of information and data. This is as it should be. Progress is best assured when every variety of opinion is represented, provided the holders of the different opinions are equally intelligent, well informed, and socially minded. Furthermore, the difference in our personal interests necessarily causes us to take a different attitude with respect to given public questions, because their solution in any particular way will affect us as individuals differently. This, too, is no misfortune. Since social action is concerned rightly with social interests, and since social in-

terests are merely the composite of individual interests, it follows that individual interests should be represented as completely as possible in social control. If each divergent interest is given a fair chance to express itself and if such expression is given the full weight which its importance merits, the resulting decision will almost certainly be correct as judged by the utilitarian standard. This is just another way of expressing the truth, already repeatedly stated, that a government with wide functions should be as democratically controlled as possible and that it should represent all existing interests.

2. Scientific Thinking.—The purpose of this volume accordingly is not to cause its readers to think alike but to assist them to think scientifically about public questions. If it has attained its purpose, it has helped the reader to realize that while there are indeed great forces controlling the affairs of the society of which he is a part, forces which he cannot destroy or modify, nevertheless he, in association with the other units of society, may direct and control these forces and make them serve human welfare.

The effect of this study should be to impress the individual with his own power and importance as an agent in his own social destiny and also to bring him to realize that that power can be effective only as it is thrown into a great common fund and made a part of the composite social power of the group. We can control our social destiny not by acting independently as individuals, but by acting as related units in a self-conscious and self-directing group. Neither the deterministic nor the "Great Man" theories of history are wholly true. Social events do not control themselves, nor does any

individual entirely control social events; yet every individual, great or small, may have a part, and must have a part whether he wills it or not, in the career of the society to which he belongs and thru it in the destiny of mankind. It rests with him whether that influence shall be ignorant, blind and selfish, or intelligent, deliberate and socially constructive.

The study of social science, therefore, tends toward the abandonment of either extreme pessimism or extreme optimism with reference to social evolution. We are not mere straws drifting upon the stream of time or dead leaves borne without our will by the winds of destiny; neither are we, either as individuals or as groups, the absolute masters of our fate. We cannot make society over arbitrarily or at will. We are subject to natural laws just as truly as the other animate or inanimate objects in the world about us. Yet just because these laws are fixed and positive, we may learn them and understand them and thru our knowledge acquire a mastery over them and make them serve us thru obeying them.

3. Proper Attitude Toward Change.—The same considerations lead us to adopt a middle ground as between conservatism and radicalism. The study of social science as well as history impresses us with the severity of the struggle and the monumental character of the effort by which our present institutions have been built up. We of today are the legatees of the past. We reap the benefits of the social endeavors of the countless generations of men who have preceded us. The very existence of our established institutions is the best evidence and guarantee of their utility. Yet on the other hand we must recognize that civilization is dynamic not static,

that it is the result of a continuous process of evolution, and that institutions which were useful in an earlier epoch may become not only useless but positively injurious under modern conditions.

Inflexible opposition to change is, therefore, as indefensible as impetuous radicalism. There can be no question that the teaching of social science points to the following of a middle course between extreme conservatism and extreme radicalism. Recognizing that the burden of proof rests upon institutions and expedients which are new and untried, yet realizing at the same time that even the best established social forms may become worn out and require sweeping modifications or even complete abandonment, we need have no fear of the changes which may come in our social organization provided those changes are left within the control of the members of society themselves and provided those members are well informed on social questions, intelligent and disposed to seek the interests of the community at large rather than their own.
