

Will They Never Awaken?

THE fourteenth annual meeting of the American Sociological Society, which took place at Chicago, Ill., Dec. 29-31, 1919, had for the general subject of its papers and discussions "The Problem of Democracy." Able speakers presented angle after angle of the question; and their expositions were closely commented on by keenly analytic minds. As the discussion ranged from abstract theory to the minutiae of present-day practical application, it might well appear that no possible aspect could have remained uncovered. The report of proceedings forms a bulky volume, in which the text of the addresses and comments occupies 243 large and closely printed pages. Surely these high pontiffs of the theory and practice of social relationships have left nothing of vital importance unsaid.

This supposition is almost justified. Capitalists, laborers, politicians, Socialists, the Church and its opponents and caustic critics, the school, the advocates and opponents of race prejudice, the philanthropists and social workers, the proponents of a host of minor reforms and readjustments, all receive thoughtful and sympathetic attention. Really only one point of view is entirely missing. Professor E. C. Hayes, of the University of Illinois, vaguely felt its lack, when he said, in the closing remarks of the meeting: "We have discussed almost everything except Democracy. Several of the speakers said that they do not know what democracy is. One member of our Association has said to me in private that he thought he should never use the word 'democracy' again." After this confession of failure, Professor Hayes, who is First Vice-President of the Society, undertook to give a belated definition of democracy in the following terms: "Democracy is organization devised and administered with impartial regard for the interests of all who participate in the organization as contrasted with organization devised and administered with primary regard for the interests of the organizers." This curious definition, which might with perfect propriety be applied to an honest theocracy or a truly benevolent despotism or oligarchy, remains as the net result of three days' discussion by the representatives of scientific sociology in the United States. To be sure, here and there a word was injected by one speaker or another regarding equality of opportunity as a thing to be much desired, although of course an unobtainable ideal, only to be quickly forgotten; and the learned speakers took exceptional pains to avoid any constructive propositions for bringing about that equality of opportunity to which passing lip service was so easily paid. In short, in this lengthy and elaborate discussion of democracy, nothing was lacking except an inquiry into the actual meaning of democracy and the fundamental steps necessary to actualize it. If these delegates had been discussing the play of "Hamlet," they would undoubtedly have omitted from consideration not only the melancholy Dane, but also the King, the Queen, Ophelia and the Ghost.

That democracy is the correlation of individual and collective rights, interests and obligations, may seem to be

an abstract statement; but it is pregnant with vital conclusions wholly obscured in the discussion of the sociologists. I am content to leave it here as a mere seed-thought, since I am developing it elsewhere in a detailed manner. It is instinctively, if not always consciously, recognized as a basic justification of the great movement for the restoration of the people's heritage through the application of the principles of Henry George. It is this which was not even adumbrated in the many addresses before the sociological Society; and as a natural consequence the one logical and thoroughgoing demand for fundamental economic justice and the establishment of a true equality of opportunity on an unshakable foundation was practically the only seriously formulated proposal in the direction of progress in the realization of democratic ideals which was totally ignored by every speaker in the gathering. This studied omission causes the whole discussion to appear hollow and insincere.

Considering the many minor points which were eagerly debated, one can scarcely take a tolerant view of so amazing an affectation of ignorance concerning a movement which aims to lay the axe at the root of the existing economic and social maladjustment. That many of the delegates do not regard the Single Tax as a sound proposition, is easily conceivable; but that any one of the number can honestly regard it as a negligible matter, is hardly to be believed. Professor Albion W. Small, of the University of Chicago, an ex-president of the Society, took an active part in the discussion. Three or four years ago, Professor Small conducted and summarized a symposium under the auspices of the Society. Has he so soon forgotten the outcome? On that occasion, a carefully selected list of persons of notable distinction and recognized authority, representing a cross section of the best thought and achievement of the country, was requested to forecast the next important step in social progress. Much to Professor Small's own evident astonishment and discomfiture, a substantial plurality declared unequivocally for the Single Tax. Neither the importance of the issues nor its advocacy by those entitled to the utmost respect has diminished in the least degree; but Professor Small, like his colleagues, remained silent as the grave regarding even the existence of such a principle or programme.

That a sound principle of collecting public revenue could by any possibility have anything to do with democracy, seems not to have entered the head of a single delegate, not even of Professor Carver, who has in certain of his writings betrayed strong leanings toward the path of economic democracy. Equally alien to the spirit of the academic assemblage was the thought that the restoration of the land to the people could possibly constitute an approach toward democratic ideals. It remained, however, for Professor David Sneed of Teachers College, Columbia University, to cap the climax of ineptitude by the following extraordinary denial of hope for democratic democracy: "Before each child of today lie some, but only some, economic possibilities. So far as human prophesy can deter-

mine, the Sahara Desert and Labrador will not become fertile within the next generation. The habitable and wealth-producing areas of the world will steadily become more crowded."

Were not the printed page before me, I should find it incredible that any man with sufficient intelligence to hold a professorate in any university, even that headed by the noted reactionary, Nicholas Murray Butler, could be so ignorant or so audacious as to assert or imply that the only unused land of the world is inaccessible or barren, and that the barrier to natural opportunity has already been reached or must be reached in the near future. Does not Professor Sneed know that with the immense and matchless resources of our great land, the density of population is barely one-tenth that of Germany and about one-twentieth that of Belgium under pre-war conditions? Does he not realize that even on Manhattan Island, the most congested spot in America, 8 per cent. of the lots are still totally unimproved, with mere nominal and unimportant improvements on a much larger percentage? Has he never heard of the measureless tracts of the best land of the nation deliberately kept in idleness by the privileged few who are suffered to monopolize it? Is he so ignorant of elementary economics as to be unable to realize that society has the power to set free these countless acres by destroying the profit in land monopoly, and that the measure to be taken is of the simplest, consisting solely in the reclamation by society of the value which attaches to the land as the direct result of social service? And if this man was in very truth so amazingly ill-informed regarding that which it behooved him to know, what shall be said of his auditors, the cream of American sociologists, who sat calmly listening, and not one of whom in the subsequent criticism uttered a word of correction or protest?

To those to whom democracy is something more than a word to conjure with or a toy for idle moments, the fiasco at the meeting of the American Sociological Society forms a subject for painful reflection. If the intellectual leaders of the nation have so purblind a vision of what is most essential, what may be hoped for from the rank and file? If there is solace, it is only to be found in the fact that the academic mind, despite its superior pretensions, is not infrequently found to lag behind the more direct perception of common men and women, who have not entangled themselves in a maze of subtle analyses and distinctions. Our college sociologists have done valuable work in their special field; but in the application of their own principles they have failed to take their expected positions in the van. Like the man who could not see the forest on account of the trees, they cannot see society or its actual needs on account of social theories. The real battle for a progressive democracy must be fought with little help on their part, although they have furnished many of the weapons which others will wield with crushing effect.

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The Schoolmaster Abroad

THERE is a general agreement as to something being desperately wrong in our social system. This is clear to all thoughtful men. The single fact that notwithstanding continuous progress in wealth-producing power there is no corresponding increase in general comfort; that the actual result is the raising of some to unreasonable riches and the depression of others into ever deepening poverty, condemns the system.

But the Schoolmaster of the day is nonplused to account for this phenomenon and, as a consequence, utterly at a loss to suggest a remedy for it. The mournful conclusion of the political economic system seems to be that it is the result of a mysterious dispensation of divine Providence.

Malthus, who combined in himself the office of Political Economist and reverend clergyman, put forth the explanation that "population tends to outrun sustenance." This as the statement of a natural law, has been accepted and incorporated in the Science of Political Economy as taught since his day.

In Thomas Carlyle there arose a thinker who named such a science "dismal," as well he might. In his picturesque style he says, "Of all the quacks that ever quacked (boasting themselves to be somebody) in any age of the world, the political economists are, for their intrinsic size, the loudest. Mercy on us, what a quack-quacking, and their egg, even if not a wind one, is of value simply one half-penny." But Carlyle himself groped in the dark, though from time to time a momentary glimpse of the truth flashed on his mind. "A man with £200,000 a year," he writes, "eats the whole fruit of 6,666 men's labor through the year, for you can get a stout spadesman to work and maintain himself for the sum of £30. Thus we have private individuals whose wages are equal to the wages of seven or eight thousands of others individual. What do these highly beneficial individuals do for their wages? Kill partridges! Can this last? No, by the soul that is in man, it cannot and will not and shall not!" But all the same, good Thomas, it can and will and does, down to this much later moment. How is it that Carlyle remained so strangely blind to the fact before his eyes that it was the system of land monopoly itself that was the secret of the trouble, and not the circumstance that landlords personally were frivolous people who were fond of idle pleasures.

Then there was Froude, another of our modern schoolmasters. "The fact," says he, "that under our present social conditions every additional child is a curse rather than a blessing to poor parents, is one which still waits for elucidation." He, too, failed to see that the spoliation involved in the landlord system was the simple and sufficient elucidation. It also accounts for the fact that Canada is fast ceasing to be what it was not long ago—the haven of the poor emigrant. The conditions here are rapidly approaching those of Europe, because we have the same basic cause at work.