

III. SOCIOLOGY.

The New Basis of Civilization. The Kennedy Lectures for 1905.

By Simon N. Patten, Ph.D., LL. D. Professor of Political Economy, Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, University of Penn. New York. The Macmillan Co. 1907.

Dr. Patten's name is thoroughly identified with the theory that the explanation of social changes and the causes of social progress are economic. The old civilization was characterized by an economic deficit; the new, by an economic surplus. "Disease, oppression, irregular work, premature old age, and race hatreds characterized the vanishing age of deficit; plenty of food, shelter, capital, security and mobility of men and goods define the age of surplus in which we act.

"The salient feature of the new civilization is work calling urgently for workmen; that of the old was the worker seeking humbly any kind of toil."

In these lectures he works out in a luminous, forceful but sometimes fanciful way the social transformations which result from this transition from social poverty to social wealth. He has chapters on the basis of the new civilization in resources, in heredity, in family life, in social consciousness, in amusement, in character, in social control; and closes with two chapters in which he discusses more specifically the character of the new civilization which is now taking shape and a program of social work which is called for in the present time.

He has a keen sense of the power of social habit, of custom; of the persistence of forms of social thought and social ideals long after the conditions which gave rise to them have passed away. These habits and ideals are the forms of social adaptation to the old conditions; but when conditions change they linger as disturbing and obstructive factors in the social situation. This accounts for many of the phenomena of this transition age. But gradually out of the changed economic conditions there spring up new habits, customs, ideals which gradually displace the old.

Limited space forbids that we should attempt to follow his thought in detail or even to give an adequate outline of it. We can only note a few of the more striking points.

Speaking of social classes, he calls attention to the chronic warfare of early society, caused by the struggle for food-supplies in the age of deficit, and remarks: "It was in such a world, when a man's death was his neighbor's gain, that our social institutions were grounded." "The traits that distinguish them (the social classes) are not additions to the sum of characters possessed by all mankind; they are the effect of a suppression of universal character showing itself on different groups in different ways. * * * * Class qualities represent losses, not growths." The absence of certain human qualities from a group constitute them aristocrats; and the same is true of the middle and the lower classes. The economic forces in the new age are working toward a balanced development of human qualities in all classes. This process is impeded by the persistence of social customs which originated in the age of deficit. "Men are moulded into their classes by the pressure of social things accumulating generation after generation, which finally sum themselves into an acquired heredity, binding men firmly to their places." This old stratification must be broken up, and is being broken up by economic forces. "Thought must be as malisle as action if social institutions are to be remodelled to serve economic ends. * * * * The extension of civilization downward does not depend at present so much upon gaining fresh victories over nature, as it does upon the demolition of the social obstacles which divide men into classes and prevent the universal democracy that unimpeded economic forces would bring about. The social status, properly determined by a man's working capacity, has now intervened between him and his relation with nature until opportunity, which should be impersonal and self-renewed at the birth of a man, has dwindled and become partizan."

The multiplication of economic opportunities open to men is limiting the power of the strong to exploit the weak, and the massing together of men in cities and in huge economic enterprises is developing in all classes, and especially in the workers, a broader social consciousness and sense of the value of co-operation. This in turn is powerfully modifying the social structure. "Competition solidifies, but co-operation mobilizes

and arrests social stratification by assuming the equality of neighbors." "Individualism and suspicion are the outcome of competition; generosity is a product of co-operation."

Dr. Patten is, perhaps, most suggestive and least convincing in his discussion of the changes in the ideal of character growing out of the transition from the age of deficit to the age of surplus. We read with a distinct shock such words as the following: "The morality of sacrifice is the antithesis of the morality of progress, and the two types contrast each other with increasing emphasis. * * * At bottom sacrifice is a physical and animal trait which has come to us in the course of biological development; and when lifted to a foremost place on the spiritual plane, it at length saps energy because it wrests away the fruits of action, and by pouring vitality into negation and undoing, keeps the world a poorer place than it might be." It is in dealing with this most important phase of life that the author's theory of the economic interpretation of social progress reveals most clearly its inadequacy. His is not the Christian conception of sacrifice. To him it means the throwing away, the absolute loss of the life sacrificed. But the Christian conception is that the life so devoted and sacrificed is not lost at all, rather it comes to its most perfect development, its highest realization, through voluntary sacrifice in the interest of others. "The morality of sacrifice," so conceived, is the very essence "of the morality of progress". And, yet, while his view of this matter is one-sided, inadequate and erroneous, his treatment of the subject is of suggestive value in a consideration of the modifications of the moral ideal which are resulting from the changed economic conditions—a line of thought to which ministers and moralists can hardly fail to give most serious attention if they would deal intelligently with the gravest practical problems of their time.

It would be interesting to call attention to other phases of the argument of these lectures; but space forbids. The advocates of the economic interpretation of social progress are doing a valuable service, although the inadequacy of their theories is manifest.

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