

THE CURE FOR SOCIAL DISCONTENT

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It is well, amid our social and industrial troubles, sometimes to look back a century or so and see whence we have come and by what route. The practice clears the vision and helps us to see ahead. We get some picture of the paths before us, and of the goals, alternative, to which they lead.

In 1807 a President of the Royal Society, speaking in the House of Commons, told his fellow members, the great majority of whom agreed with him, that, —

however specious in theory the project might be of giving education to the laboring classes of the poor, it would in effect be found to be prejudicial to their morals and happiness: it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture, and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them; instead of teaching them subordination it would render them factious and refractory, as was evident in the manufacturing counties; it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity; it would render them insolent to their superiors, and in a few years the result would be that the Legislature would find it necessary to direct the strong arm of power toward them, and to furnish the executive magistrate with much more vigorous laws than were now in force.

The occasion of these remarks, the tone of which would shock almost all of us to-day, was a debate upon a bill for the general provision of elementary schools throughout England. Needless to say, it was not a Government measure. It found few friends in either

House, and was killed by the House of Lords upon the advice of the Lord Chancellor and the Archbishop of Canterbury.

The first factory act had not then been passed. Not till 1819 did Parliament take pity on the child and make a first beginning of reform by forbidding his employment in a cotton mill for more than twelve hours a day — for more than twelve hours a day unless, sturdy little fellow, he (or she) was more than nine! It took fourteen more years to raise the age to thirteen and bring the hours of labor down to nine. The reform did not extend beyond the factories. In the coal-pits cruelty unthinkable continued till 1842, and tiny mites of five and six of both sexes still worked for twelve hours a day and more, in the dark. After 1842, things were better. No girls or women could be employed underground at all, and no boys till they were ten.

Universal compulsory education, of course, was still nearly forty years away, and there are labor leaders still living who will tell how they left school under bye-laws as soon as they were eight. Slowly, very slowly, conditions have improved. Much has been done, but very much remains to do. To-day no child under twelve may be employed at all, and no child under fourteen may be employed in a pit or factory or upon any industrial process. As for education, as soon as peace has been declared with Turkey, attendance at school will be compulsory up to the age of fourteen; and the Education Act of 1918,

when it has its full effect, will take us further still, unless indeed the reactionary gets the upper hand and we sacrifice our future to a false economy.

The shock of war awoke a brief-lived enthusiasm for education. The early successes of the German taught us that we must discover, develop, and employ all the resources of mind within the country if we would beat him. Now that he is beaten, the old indifference gains once more upon us. Squandermania must be checked, and Mr. Fisher, of all men, is a spendthrift. If schooling is to cost so much, we must do without it (only, 'we' shall not; it is 'they' who will — a very different thing). We could afford to teach men how to kill, no matter what it cost. It is not so plain to us that the safety of the State equally requires that we shall afford to teach them how to live.

For a time after the war had ended we were told that, if we would survive in the great world-fight for trade which was to follow, we must still discover brains and develop them with all our war-time diligence. Members of Parliament and platform politicians had no doubt of it — no doubt at all, for eighteen months. But the seed had been sown upon a stony soil. Men and women, boys and girls, were still but a part of the industrial machine. The politician and the employer had advanced so far in a century as to believe, for a few months, that it would pay to educate them to a point of technical efficiency. But out of that shallow soil could spring no vision, nor any faith in the power of education, and of education only, to teach men and women how to establish and maintain in safety, by vote and influence, a great progressive, democratic state, and live as self-respecting and wholly worthy members of it. There is no resolve, no wish even, that this shall be; no conviction that it should be.

There are those who still think, with the President of the Royal Society, that education inspires discontent. They are the men who cry out on Mr. Fisher, and call for the revision of his Education Act. Mr. Fisher, with one of his many illuminating aphorisms, routs these recreants. 'Education,' he tells us, 'does not cause discontent, but heals it.' But let us beware. The education that shall do this is more than a bare minimum of reading, writing, and arithmetic; more than a technical training for the workshop or the office. It must be a liberal education, and it must be no exceptional privilege for a favored few: all must share it. It is but a form of insurance against uttermost disaster.

If we *will* sow the wind, we know the whirlwind follows. An uneducated democracy is a danger to itself and to the world. Let the Russian revolution teach us. An ignorant and down-trodden people, inflamed by hopes that have proved so tragically vain, followed with blind enthusiasm leaders whose sufferings under repression and persecution had distorted their mental growth, and made of them fanatics — honest and most able and, therefore, most dangerous fanatics. They are extreme men, men of one idea, to the service of which all their reading, all their thinking, all their great intellectual ability, have been steadily directed. They trained themselves, as so many of our young labor leaders are training themselves, to serve a cause — not to seek and follow truth with a single heart. History, as they read it, tells one long tale of wrong. The past has nothing to teach them, so they will not search it; and while they will not, ripe judgment never can be theirs. They take no account of the ways of human nature, or of the age-long story of its action and reaction under the stimulus of circumstances; for, as they judge,

the nature of the capitalist is always to exploit and oppress the worker, and there's an end of it.

But that is only to kick against the pricks. For knowledge in its widest sense, true knowledge, they have no use. It is too balanced; it makes no partisans. They have made up their minds before they begin their studies, offending against Bacon's golden rule. 'Read not,' he says, 'to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider.' These men, and those who follow them, are upon a road that leads straight and swiftly to ruin and despair. And that road we too shall surely travel to its end, unless we set the young upon the path of knowledge, and teach them to weigh and consider; to search out with reverence the lessons of the past, and with humility to accept their mission as fore-runners of that distant Future which shall be so infinitely wiser, nobler, happier than To-day. For we are not, as some would have it, the heirs of all the ages. Our civilization is but a transitory phase. It is born of the far past; it will give place to the long hereafter. The learning of the twentieth century has not summed up all knowledge.

'What we have seen and felt, what we think we know,' says Grayson, in his delightful *Adventures in Contentment*, 'are insignificant compared with that which may be known.'

Not long ago, coming in from my fields, I fell to thinking of the supreme wonder of a tree; and as I walked I met the professor.

'How,' I asked, 'does the sap get up to the top of those great maples and elms? What power is there that should draw it upward against the force of gravity?'

He looked at me a moment with his peculiar slow smile.

'I don't know,' he said.

'What!' I exclaimed; 'do you mean to tell me that science has not solved this simplest of natural phenomena?'

'We do not know,' he said. 'We explain, but we do not know.'

There is, after all, but a difference of degree between the professor and those early scientists among primeval men, who, observing the vigorous growth of corn self-sown in the broken soil about the burial mounds, attributed it, not to the breaking of the soil, but to the presence of the corpse, and taught thenceforward that those who would be progressive and raise crops for food must kill a man and bury him, must make a sacrifice, at the time of sowing. They did not know; they explained. Even Newton did not know, he only explained, when he gave to the world his law of gravitation. Einstein himself can do no more. Time, space, matter, force, mind, God, still present riddles to us beyond our wit to solve.

Knowledge is but a relative term. It varies with man's power to observe and to interpret. It is one thing to-day, another to-morrow. Between the Jehovah of the Exodus and the Jehovah of Isaiah the difference is profound. And there is not yet an end of revelation. The God of ten thousand years hence will surely differ as profoundly from the God whom our doctors of religion preach to us.

'The reading of histories is the school of wisdom,' says Amyot in his preface to Plutarch's *Lives*. In that school the boy, the man, even the young man, shall learn intellectual humility, he shall be trained in judgment and shall gain vision. A Darwin, before whose mind is always present the infinite extent of the unknown, is humble. It is the men of little knowledge who are so arrogantly confident, so intolerant. That arrogance and that intolerance threaten danger. They are symptoms of the disease of discontent, which

springs from ignorance and old injustice, and for which education is the only cure. One does not heap reproach on those who sicken of some widespread plague. That would be mere idiocy: it would neither heal the sick nor protect the sound against infection. One fetches in the doctor and the nurse and all the apparatus of preventive medicine. It is equally futile, equally impolitic, to reproach the hothead leaders of the labor movement, or the masses who applaud them. When injustice and ignorance are mated, suspicion, folly, ill-considered and precipitate action, even criminal violence, are their rightful progeny. Who from such a union could expect to issue reason in argument, wisdom in judgment, restraint in action, tolerance in relations?

Those who condemn the worker and his leaders, because of the suicidal folly of so much that they say and do, have not tried to see things from the worker's point of view. They should read what the workers read, and what is a grim tradition among them — the industrial history of the early nineteenth century. It is a tale of iniquitous injustice practiced by the employer, with the approval and assistance of Parliament and the law courts: of monstrous hours that made of life a slavery; of wages so low that a man must take poor relief and put his mites of five and six to work if he would live (and those wages would be reduced at the first hint of trade depression, but never raised again upon the advent of renewed prosperity); of trickery that always made of industriousness an excuse to clip something off the rate of pay for piece-work; of legislation steadily directed against him; of magistrates who twisted old statutes to silence his protests, and then connived at the flagrant evasion by employers of the few acts of Parliament that restrained their greed

or put a limit to their tyrannous abuse of power.

Treatment such as this leaves memories that are not easily obliterated, and suspicions that import prejudice into every argument. And the bitterness of these memories is intensified by the daily contrast between the lives of rich and poor. 'They make us gain for them by our toil what they spend in their pride,' said John Ball nearly six centuries ago; and the worker's way of thinking it is still the same to-day.

Labor does take narrow and exclusive views. But how should breadth of view and a large tolerance find a way into lives that are spent in poor houses and mean streets, and a drab environment in which cultured intercourse, social amenities, great literature, poetry, art, the drama, travel, and all that makes life worth living, have no part?

There is only one medicine for what is amiss with labor. Education, a liberal education, alone can cure the sickness and prevent its further spread. And education, this sovereign cure, we stint and dilute till it has lost all power for good. To the great mass of the people we offer as a substitute mere beggarly elements that have no healing in them. As children we lead them, with an air of patronage, up to a little ladder set in a high park wall, beyond which there lies (so they have heard) a copious spring of healing, draughts inexhaustible of literature, history, art, music, for which they are athirst. All that opens the mind and trains the judgment is there, but they may not approach.

The wall should be breached, so that all who will may enter; secondary education, like elementary, should be free. But the wall is not breached, and there is still but one way in — the little ladder, before which stands on guard a sentry, the examiner, who, like Odysseus in Hades, by the spot where

the loud-voiced rivers met, admits but a chosen few out of the mass that surges round. The others he turns back into the thirsty wilderness, where they jostle for the rest of their maimed lives, discontented and irritable, and ever more suspicious of a system that absorbs their best into the world above them, and leaves them apart, hewers of wood and drawers of water, depressed intellectually, socially, and industrially, though formidable by numbers, and armed with all the power of the vote, which ignorance dooms them to misuse.

Who shall wonder that uneducated masses, moved by resentment at the long tale of manifold injustice, and always oppressed by an insistent dread of unemployment, resort to restriction of output, and strike for rates of pay which they cannot (or perhaps will not)

earn; or that, when their products in consequence are undersold by foreign competitors, and trade to their own discomfiture falls off, they are ready to believe that their employers are entering upon a wide conspiracy to rob them of their wage once more?

It is folly, but a folly that is the inevitable fruit of ignorance. If we will permit ignorance to exist when we might dispel it, we must not wonder that we make potential revolutionaries. Until we educate, labor cannot see the truth of things. It can read the seditious pamphlets that the President of the Royal Society was so much afraid of, but it cannot weigh them and consider, for it lacks the wider knowledge and the power of judgment needful to enable it to detect false reasoning and reject with decision and advice.

BRITISH POLICY IN THE NEAR EAST

BY JACQUES BARDOUX

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JACQUES BAINVILLE, in an illuminating article, recently pointed out that, if the British government has succeeded in imposing its financial and territorial decisions upon Europe, in Asia it has suffered repeated checks. Persia is lost; Afghanistan is threatened; Palestine is agitated, and India is full of unrest. And now the Greek defeat, foreseen some months ago by my collaborator, Madame Berthe Georges-Gaulis, writing in these columns, ruins the chimerical policy of revolution and conquest which would

substitute a Greek empire for that of Mohammedan Turkey. The stability of our work in Africa, which advances slowly and without much public attention, stands in happy contrast with the instability of this Asiatic adventure, which no longer bears the mark of British prudence or that of English practicality.

These repeated checks may be explained by errors originally made in the choice of objectives. The Eastern question is a single question; it is not possible to subdivide it into parts.