

their fanciful interpretation of motives and of character—how barren is *this* conception of the “laboratory method” as applied to the study of social conditions.

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Problems of Modern Industry. By SIDNEY and BEATRICE WEBB.
London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1898. — 286 pp.

The papers in this volume have already been published, but their collection in a new form will be justified by all readers; for no one has stated more coherently or more powerfully than these authors the great issues upon which the industrial struggles of the next generation will center. A single passage may represent the Webbs' point of view.

When we are concerned with the propertied classes — when, for instance, it is sought to open up to women higher education or the learned professions — it is easy to see that freedom is secured by abolishing restrictions. But when we come to the restrictions between capital and labor, an entirely new set of considerations come into play. In the life of the wage-earning class, absence of regulation does not mean personal freedom.

If three of the eleven chapters be excepted, all the others are, explicitly or by implication, a justification of the passage quoted. Those on “Women's Wages,” “Women and the Factory Acts,” “Hours of Labor,” “Sweating System,” “The Poor Law,” “Coöperation and Trade Unionism” — one and all give proof, in theory or by appeal to experience, that social forces must be organized in defense of the mass of the laborers. The English factory system, moreover, is studied to show how much more freedom the laborer has under its régime than would be found in unregulated industries of the same class of labor.

This discussion is now of special importance for those interested in our American situation. Here the strong and successful object to “regulation.” This class, even among the wage-earners, are perhaps growingly contemptuous of trade-union restrictions, if only they (the successful workers) are able to get advantages from machine production. The increasing superiority of this country over England in the iron and steel industry is certainly in part owing to the lack of trade unions here or to their practical subjection. Thus, the Illinois Steel Company has trade unions, but all employees must sign a clause which expressly states that the new applications of science and invention shall be absolutely in the hands of the company. The trade union cannot here, as in England, delay for a moment the adoption

of new processes. In several concerns the writer has been told by a large number of successful laborers that the trade unions are, on the whole, a nuisance. The position of the Webbs seems to be, that the state should more and more enter in as regulator—that society should itself extend what trade unions have done so much to bring about. For, in the United States, and doubtless more and more in England, the concentrated power of *la grande industrie* is steadily making it more difficult for trade unions to regulate from the social point of view. Unless we are to fall back upon the *laissez-faire* doctrine, pure and simple, and trust that unhindered competition will not only advance the strong and industrially fit laborers, but also the great body of the weaker ones, it must be admitted that the time has come when society must itself take up the work of regulation for which the trade union is becoming too weak. To form an opinion upon this point, one must face the ugly conditions of the coal industry and the fact that (as about the blast furnaces) a multitude of men are now working twelve hours a day. No one can watch the strain, even of the ten-hour worker, in these great mills without wondering what conceivable human interest can remain after the day's or the week's work is done. The manager of the largest business in the Middle West told me :

It's too hard work, of course, but no power can stop it unless we all have to stop it together. Our chief rival has even gone to work Sundays, and all those that have to do with furnace work must stand it eighty-four hours a week. It's cruel on the men, but I don't see how it can be helped.

In the business referred to, the trade union has been hopelessly crushed. Is this process to work itself out to the bitter end, or will society at length make it possible that the laborer shall have some chance of an individual and family life that is at least tolerable? No one has given stronger or subtler reasons than the Webbs to show that legal enactment must have far wider application than now exists.

In the strong essay with which the volume closes—"Socialism, True and False"—it is admitted that the wages system, as determined by competition, must go. The new wages system, we are told, must be "deliberately settled according to the needs of the occupation." As to what this implies we are left in no doubt. Mr. Choate's salary as ambassador in London has distinct reference to his needs in that expensive society; and Mr. Webb would extend that method of fixing compensation to every day-laborer in the land. This implies a bewildering extension of conscious state or social regulation; but it is not beyond Mill's suggestion, as he comments upon Comte,

This rough method of settling the laborer's share of the produce by the competition of the market may represent a practical necessity, but certainly not a moral ideal. Its defense is, that civilization has not hitherto been equal to organizing anything better than this first rude approach to an equitable distribution. Rude as it is, we for the present go less wrong by leaving the thing to settle itself than by settling it artificially in any mode which has yet been tried.

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Untersuchungen über die Lage des Handwerks in Deutschland.

Schriften des Vereins für Socialpolitik, Bd. LXII-LXX (inclusive).

Leipzig, Dunker & Humbolt, 1895-98. — 9 vols., cvii, 5253 pp.

The political confusion which prevailed in Germany during the first half of the present century was reflected in the industrial condition of the German people; for the local prejudices of the small states fostered commercial isolation, and as a consequence the guild system remained the prevailing type of industry. The handicraftsman, like his father before him, served his apprenticeship and slowly made his way toward the coveted position of master. He not only had not felt the throes of the industrial revolution, but it had scarcely dawned upon his almost mediæval mind that such a revolution was taking place. Only after the political disturbances of 1848 did the development of the factory system begin to cause commotion in the industrial world; and not till the establishment of the Empire in 1871 did the pressure of the new upon the old system make the *Handwerkfrage* the burning question of the day. Then it was discussed in conventions, the government was appealed to, its scientific bearings were taken up in economic journals and in numerous monographs, and finally the Verein für Socialpolitik, at its annual meeting of March 13, 1892, resolved to make a careful and comprehensive study of the question. Professor Karl Bücher, Dr. Gensel and Professor A. von Miaskowski were appointed a committee to plan and supervise the investigation.

The plan which was adopted is outlined by Professor Bücher in Vol. I of the *Untersuchungen*. The general object of the investigation, he says, is "to ascertain the actual conditions prevailing in the handicraft system and its ability to compete with other forms of industry in placing goods on the national market." In order to obtain results that shall be of scientific value, all the industries in which the handicraft system prevails to any extent must be studied; the whole empire must be included in the investigation; and such