

TWO NOTEWORTHY BOOKS ON DEMOCRACY¹

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THESE are books of which it is impossible to make an epitome, and which therefore it is impossible to review save in the way of calling attention to their excellence. Bryce's "American Commonwealth," Lowell's "Study of Representative Government in Europe," Thayer's "Study of Cavour," illustrate what is meant by this statement. Two new volumes, "Progressive Democracy," by Herbert Croly, and "Drift and Mastery," by Walter Lippmann, come in this category. No man who wishes seriously to study our present social, industrial, and political life with the view of guiding his thought and action so as to work for National betterment in the future can afford not to read these books through and through and to ponder and digest them. They worthily carry forward the argument contained in the authors' previous works—"The

Promise of American Life," by Mr. Croly, and "A Preface to Politics," by Mr. Lippmann.

Both of these writers stand foremost among those of our thinkers who recognize the grave abuses of our present system and the need of breaking the shackles which the interested beneficiaries and the disinterested but fanatical devotees of the past would impose upon us. Both thoroughly realize the absolute need that we shall move forward toward a definite goal unless we are willing to see misfortune come to our people. But each is as far as possible from those unwise reformers who denounce everything that smacks of the past as vicious, and who consider all change of any kind as in itself beneficial. Both of them—and Mr. Lippmann especially so—are believers in a great increase in the application of the principle of collective action. But neither of them makes a fetish of ultra-collectivism any more than of ultra-individualism, and each is entirely fearless in opposing mischievous action, even

¹Progressive Democracy. By Herbert Croly. The Macmillan Company, New York. \$2.
Drift and Mastery. By Walter Lippmann. Mitchell Kennerley, New York. \$1.

although it is now or has been recently supported by the great majority of our people.

Mr. Croly explicitly points out that the position which American conservatism has elected to defend arouses on the part of its defenders a sincere and admirable loyalty of conviction. He recognizes that our traditional constitutional system has had a long and honorable career, and has contributed enormously to American political and social prosperity, giving stability, order, and security to a new political experiment undertaken in a new country under peculiarly hazardous and trying conditions. He also gives the wise warning that in order to attack the old system progressivism must not occupy a position of mere nihilism, of mere destruction; that it must not represent wild-eyed and unbalanced seeking after an impossible millennium; and, furthermore, that it must be constructive rather than restorative. In his book he poses the two questions: (1) Whether any substitute is needed for the traditional system, and (2) Whether the progressive creed offers what can fairly be considered such a working substitute. He answers both questions in the affirmative; but the value of his book, although it consists partly in the working out of the definite conclusions he reaches, consists even more in the spirit in which he has attempted to reach these conclusions.

Mr. Croly strikes at the root of the difficulties encountered by men who seriously strive for a juster economic and social life when he points out that the chief obstacles to securing the needed betterment are found in the legalism with which we have permitted our whole Government to be affected, and in the extreme difficulty of amending the Constitution. As for the latter point, objection to an easier method of amending the Constitution can be reasonably advanced only by those who sincerely and frankly disbelieve in the fitness of the people for self-government. Government under a Constitution which in actual practice can be amended only on the terms which formerly permitted the Polish Parliament to legislate, and under a system of court procedure which makes the courts the ultimate irresponsible interpreters of the Constitution, and therefore ultimately the irresponsible makers of the law under the Constitution—such government really represents a system as emphatically undemocratic as government by a hereditary aristocracy. As Mr. Croly says, what is needed is not to increase the power of Congress at the

expense of the judiciary, or to conserve the power of the judiciary at the expense of Congress or of the Executive, but to increase popular control over all the organs of government; and this can be accomplished only by the increase of direct popular power over the Constitution.

No less admirable is Mr. Croly's showing of the damage done to justice and to the whole democratic ideal by the saturation of our Government with legalism. As he points out, the final outcome of this effort was to make the paralyzing of administration by law an every-day spectacle. Under such conditions the ship of state merely drifted round and round. In practice the public welfare was sedulously sacrificed to this theory of government by litigation. The law continually prevented the correction of abuses and continually shielded officials who had gone wrong, but it never helped to make things go right. Corruption increased and special privilege was fostered. In practice the equal protection of the laws meant very unequal opportunity to bring lawsuits, and government by law was turned into government by corporations and political bosses. This continued until observers of vision finally became convinced that democracy and legalism were incompatible.

The great corporation, the great corporation lawyer, and the boss are now merged together as representing rule over the people, and the demagogue, whose revolt occasionally tempers this far from beneficent despotism, often aggravates as many ills as he remedies. Mr. Croly points out how direct government by the people themselves, entered into with wisdom and caution, offers, on the whole, not only the best but the only real remedy for these abuses. He shows that to call pure democracy "retrogressive" or a "return to old forms" is a mere play upon words, of no more account than it would be to stigmatize in similar fashion the attempt to recover classic humanism after its eclipse in the Middle Ages. The adoption of direct government may in the end accomplish most of its purposes by reinvigorating representative government; and not the least interesting part of Mr. Croly's book is a study of the method proposed in Oregon for achieving this result. Mr. Croly emphatically believes in nationalizing our democracy, but this does not in the least mean mere centralization of power. On the contrary, he no more makes a fetish of centralization than of par-

ticularism. It is eminently desirable that we should keep in State and in city vigorous forms of local self-government. What is meant by the nationalization of the democratic method is the giving to the whole people themselves the power to do those things that are essential in the interest of the whole people.

The dominant note of Mr. Lippmann's book is the insistence that in the present unrest there is altogether too much aimless drift, aimless beating of the waves to and fro, and that what is needed is a mastery of the movement; which can come in a democracy only if the people, or at least the leaders of the people, have the courage to face the facts and the wisdom and vision to think rationally about them. Mr. Lippmann, with caustic humor, shows the folly alike of the persons who believe in the non-existent virtues of a non-existent golden past and of the persons who merely dream of a golden future without making any sane effort to better conditions in the present. Too many of the dreamers of the last type refuse to confront the uncomfortable fact that in life retrogression is almost, and at times quite, as common as progress, and that there is no necessary truth whatever in the proposition that whatever is later in time is better in fact. He shows that no liberty worth having can come from a mere happy-go-lucky breaking of chains. "It is with emancipation that real tasks begin, and liberty is a searching challenge, for it takes away the guardianship of the master and the comfort of the priest."

Two of the most fundamental and admirable chapters in Mr. Lippman's book are those entitled "A Key to the Labor Movement" and "A Nation of Villagers." In the former he makes the point, which cannot be too much insisted upon, that strong labor organizations are indispensable to progress. They not only benefit the persons who are thus organized, but they benefit society as a whole. It is the economic weakness and wretchedness of those who constitute the Industrial Workers of the World which make the Industrial Workers of the World so potent a source of aimless, of merely destructive, unrest. It is the strength and economic power of the great brotherhoods of railway employees and of similar effective labor organizations which have given, not merely dignity and strength to the labor movement, but also additional solidity to our social structure.

Nowhere is Mr. Lippmann's clear sight and courage better shown than in his treatment of the trusts. During the past quarter of a century probably more mischief has been done, and is now being done, by our treatment of the trusts than by any other one phase of our governmental activity. He points out that the Sherman Anti-Trust Law has, on the whole, worked very great evil. Indeed, almost the only good that has been accomplished under it has been accomplished by the Northern Securities suit, and this merely by establishing the power of the National Government to deal with corporations engaged in interstate business, a power secured by getting the Supreme Court to reverse a previous most unwise and improper decision. The Sherman Anti-Trust Law should only remain as applicable to corporations which refuse to obey the decrees of an adequate, powerful administrative body in the nature of an interstate business commission. Mr. Lippmann is, with justice, equally severe upon those who have organized the "trusts" that do evil and upon the professional anti-trust leaders who have endeavored merely to break up big business corporations and to secure the "new freedom" by bringing us back to an era of unlimited and ruthless competition between small business concerns. He says, quite justly, that "the stupid hostility of anti-trust laws" has perverted all real constructive policy on the part of the Nation and the States, has concentrated the thinking of our people on inessentials, has driven creative business men to underhand methods, and has put a high money value on intrigue and legal cunning, demagoguery, and waste. "The trusts have survived it all, but in mutilated form, the battered makeshifts of a trampled promise. They have learned every art of evasion—the only art reformers allowed them to learn." Of course our policy as regards the trusts should be frankly to accept in its essentials the doctrine laid down by President Van Hise in his book entitled "Combination and Control."

Mr. Lippmann sees clearly, as does Mr. Croly, that democracy cannot possibly be achieved save among a people fit for democracy. There can be no real political democracy unless there is something approaching an economic democracy. A democracy must consist of men who are intellectually, morally, and materially fit to be their own masters. There can be neither political nor industrial democracy unless people are reasonably well-

to-do, and also reasonably able to achieve the difficult task of self-mastery. As Mr. Lippmann says, the first item in any rational programme for a democratic state must be the insistence on a reasonably high minimum standard of life, and therefore of pay, for the average worker.

It is not possible even for reformers of lofty vision and fine and sane judgment to treat of everything. Neither of these two books dwells sufficiently upon, although both of them hint at, certain vital facts which are connected with a further fundamental fact, that there must be ample prosperity in the nation. Public welfare depends upon general public prosperity, and the reformer whose reforms interfere with the general prosperity will accomplish little.

We cannot pay for what the highest type of democracy demands unless there is a great abundance of prosperity. A business that does not make money necessarily pays bad wages and renders poor service. Merely to change the ownership of the business without making it yield increased profits will achieve nothing. In practice this means that when the Nation suffers from hard times wage-workers will concern themselves, and must concern themselves, primarily with a return to good times, and not with any plan for securing social and industrial justice. If women cannot get any work, and nevertheless have to live, they will be far more concerned with seeing a factory opened in which they can work at night or work twelve hours every day than they are concerned with the abolition of night work or the limitation of hours of labor. Exactly the same is true of men. In the recent election in Pennsylvania the majority of the miners and wage-workers generally voted for the Republican machine, although this Republican machine had just defeated a workmen's compensation act, a child labor law, a minimum wage for women law, and various other bits of very desirable labor legislation. The

attitude of the wage-workers was perfectly simple. They wished employment. They wished a chance to get a job. They believed that they had more chance if the candidates of the Republican machine were elected than they would otherwise have. Personally I very strongly believe that they were in error; but it was their belief that counted. The average voter usually sees what he is voting about in very simple form. He does not regard the political picture as an etching and follow out the delicate tracery. He treats it as a circus poster, in which the colors are in very vivid contrast and are laid on with a broad brush. When the average man feels the pinch of poverty, the only things he sees in the political picture are the broad, vivid colors which in his mind deal with that particular matter. He wishes to have his material condition improved at the present time or in the immediate future; and for the moment questions of ultimate betterment, and especially of moral betterment, sink into abeyance. This attitude is in no way peculiar to the laboring man or the farmer. It is just as evident in the big business man and in his college-bred son, and in the wealthy clubs of which these two make up most of the membership.

Finally, it is imperative to count the cost of all reforms, and therefore to remember that only a wealthy state can spend money sufficient to embody the reform into law. There is no point in having prosperity unless there can be an equitable division of prosperity. But there can be no equitable division of prosperity until the prosperity is there to divide. All reformers with any wisdom will keep this fact steadily in mind, and will realize that it is their duty in all legislation to work for the general prosperity of the community; and this in spite of the further fact that no good comes from the performance of this first duty unless some system of equity and justice is built upon the prosperity thus secured.