

## A GREAT SOCIAL NEED.<sup>1</sup>

BY I. W. HOWERTH.

ONE OF THE MARKS which distinguish our age as transitional is the extension of scientific interest to the facts of humanity. While physical science is engaging no less attention than formerly, men are beginning to realise more than ever the importance of the social sciences. They are beginning to see that the scientific results obtained from the study of human beings may be no less valuable than those derived from a study of the earth's crust or of its flora and fauna. There is therefore more speculation concerning the possibilities of social life, more talk of social ideals, and a deeper longing for their realisation.

The causes of this new interest are not far to seek. It results in the first place from the breaking down of the old theological conception of man and society, and the establishment of saner ideas in regard to human destiny. As the advance of the physical sciences was long retarded by the old view of the approaching end of the world, so the current of thought in the social sciences has been kept back by the theological ideas that society is incurably corrupt, that the debasement of man adds to the glory of God, and that social ills are evidences of divine wrath. We have only to read the story of the pestilences that devastated various parts of Europe in the early centuries, or the lives of the old saints, many of whom sought to save their souls by the practice of various indignities toward the body, to realise the magnitude of the obstacles which these ideas placed in the way of the social sciences.<sup>2</sup>

Slowly new ideas of human excellence and of social destiny have developed. It is no longer impious to seek to make the most of this life, and we are now looking for the golden age of society not in the past but in the future. The sources of human suffering

<sup>1</sup>An address delivered before the Workingmen's Club at the University Settlement, Chicago.

<sup>2</sup>On this point see White's *Warfare of Science with Religion*, Chapter 14.

are now known to be in society itself, and are no longer referred to the will of God, hence the idea that they are removable by social action. Gradually we are perceiving with Amiel that order and harmony would result from free adhesion and voluntary submission to a common ideal, that "the model state ought to resemble "a great musical society, in which every one submits to be organised, subordinated and disciplined for the sake of art and for the "sake of producing a masterpiece."<sup>1</sup>

Along with these ideas has developed a consciousness of social evils. Popular education has opened the eyes of the people to social inequalities, as well as enlarged the circle of individual wants. This has bred a feeling of discontent which only the removal of social ills can allay, and almost everybody now believes in the possibility of their removal. Those who do not so believe, those who look upon efforts at social amelioration as hopeless, who think with Voltaire that we shall leave this world as foolish and as wicked as we found it on our arrival, must accept the philosophy of Schopenhauer.<sup>2</sup> "If you try to imagine as nearly as you can," says he, "what amount of misery, pain, and suffering of every "kind the sun shines upon in its course, you will admit that it "would be much better if, on the earth as little as on the moon, "the sun were able to call forth the phenomena of life; and if, "here as there, the surface were still in a crystalline state." This indeed is the conclusion if social ills are not remediable. "If there is no hope," says Professor Huxley, "of a large improvement of the condition of the greater part of the human family; "if it is true that the increase of knowledge, the winning of the "greater dominion over nature which is its consequence, and the "wealth which follows upon that dominion are to make no difference in the extent and the intensity of want with its concomitant "degradation amongst the masses of the people, I should hail the "advent of some kindly comet which would sweep the whole "affair away as a desirable consummation."<sup>3</sup> But the doctrine of Schopenhauer has few adherents. The present consciousness of social evils has not destroyed hope. On the contrary, the belief in social regeneration was never stronger than it is to-day. Witness the optimistic tone of our literature, the various institutions whose aim is social betterment, the thousands of men and women who are devoting their lives to social service.

Now this interest of society in itself, this social self-consciousness, this disposition to construct social ideals and this belief in

<sup>1</sup> Journal Intime, p. 233.    <sup>2</sup> Studies in Pessimism, p. 6.    <sup>3</sup> *Nineteenth Century*, May, 1890.

their realisation, has given rise to a social need which in our enthusiasm for social reform we are liable to overlook. This need is social self-knowledge. Such knowledge is the first step to social reform. In our impatience for a better social condition, we are likely to forget the necessity of this preliminary study, and to proceed without it. This seems to be characteristic of most so-called Christian sociologists. Dr. Herron, for instance, while admitting that observance of existing phenomena is the beginning of sociology does not proceed from such a beginning. "No sociological method," says he, "is so wholly unscientific or so misses the chief facts, as that which confines itself to observing and tabulating social conditions."<sup>1</sup> But reforms undertaken without this preliminary step are doomed to failure. They are costly experiments which bring returns disproportionate to the outlay. It would all be very well if as soon as we become conscious of social evils we could apply the appropriate remedies. But this cannot be done. The physician who knows no more than that his patient is sick is not yet ready to prescribe. He must study his case before he can effect a cure. As the social body is more complex than the human organism, how much greater is the necessity for an accurate knowledge of social conditions on the part of those who would heal society. Society is now conscious of its ailments. It believes in the possibility of a cure. Our first necessity is a careful and impartial study of present conditions. "Hitherto," says a recent writer, "the race has stumbled forward, fighting blindly, struggling manfully for life. Now the epoch before us is one of consciousness—the open-eyed, dignified manhood of our race. Power, possession, both are ours; we only wait for knowledge which will enable us to apply them to the good and happiness of all."<sup>2</sup> This knowledge, I repeat, is a necessity. We must have it before we shall be able to modify our social conditions so as to do away with the evils which afflict us, the miseries of poverty and disease, of drunkenness and crime, of the fierce, inhuman struggle for the opportunity to make a living, of all the evils in fact which weigh us down and prevent our realisation of a happier social state.

There has been some social study in the past, of course, but it has been of a too general nature. We have had natural histories of mankind, histories of civilisation and the like, all useful in a way, but our great need to-day is something more specific. We need careful and impartial study of social institutions. The constitution of the family, the structure and functions of the Church,

<sup>1</sup> See *The Christian Society*, p. 18.    <sup>2</sup> Jane Hume Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, p. 49.

of the State, of the Government, are questions which need closer examination than has ever yet been given. We need local study rather than a study of society at large. The attention that has been given to modern institutions has often been little more than vague questionings concerning them as abstractions. As the old economists, finding no man in society answering to their purpose, created a being whom they called the economic man, and found considerable satisfaction in theorising about the conduct of such a man in a society composed of similar monstrosities, so men to-day write long articles about the school, the Church, the saloon, as they conceive them to be without giving the slightest attention to the actual church in which they worship, the school in which their children are educated, or the saloon around the corner. With these institutions as they manifest themselves in our own neighborhood, or in our own town or city, study should begin. What are they essentially? What is their function? Are they performing it? These are the first questions we should attempt to answer.

We have already a vast amount of theorising about these institutions and about society. To be sure we have also the new science of sociology which discourages mere speculation, but this science itself recognises the great need which I am trying to emphasise. Too much must not be expected from it. It has its own preliminary tasks. While the laity are expecting from it the immediate solution of social problems, the initiated know that its boundaries must first be laid, its methods determined, and its facts gathered. It must be remembered too that the early days of a science are likely to be days of philosophising. It has been so with all the other sciences. Beautiful theories are woven out of fancies of the brain. In geology, for instance, we are all acquainted with those early impossible theories of the earth which were the result of speculative thinking. Before geology could become a science in fact as well as in name, it had to learn, as Professor Sollas has said, "that if we want to know how the earth was made, the first essential is to study the earth itself, to investigate with patient drudgery every detail that it presents, and particularly the structures that can be seen in river banks, sea cliffs, quarries, pits, and mines."<sup>1</sup> So sociology, still in its youth, finds many social theories which must go the way of early speculations about the earth, and must enter upon an era of careful, impartial, and scientific study of the actual facts of life, the banks and cliffs, quarries, pits, and mines of the social world.

<sup>1</sup> *Popular Science Monthly*, December, 1894.

Let us now look at some of the demands for the kind of studs which I am insisting upon. In the first place it is demanded by the social and industrial changes which have recently taken place, as well as by modern social and industrial conditions. For these changes and conditions have given rise to the social problems we have to solve. Consider for a moment a few of the changes which have taken place during the last century. About one hundred years ago we had that remarkable series of inventions which completely revolutionised our methods of production. In 1769 Watt invented the steam engine, and Cartwright improved the process of spinning. In 1770 Hargreaves invented the spinning jenny. In 1787 the weavers were enabled to keep pace with the spinners by the aid of Cartwright's power-loom. In 1793 the cotton gin was invented, and in 1807 the power of steam was applied to navigation. The results of these improvements can hardly be overestimated. Home manufacture gave place to the factory system. "The weaver," said Walpole, "whose cottage had been his factory, and whose hand loom had been his only implement, found himself beaten by the great manufacturer, whose machinery enabled one pair of hands to do the work of ten men." Increased production demanded an extension of the market. An extended market gave rise to national division of labor. Population gathered about the industrial centres; hence the growth of cities, so marvellously illustrated in our own country, where since 1800 the city population has increased from three per cent. to more than thirty per cent. of the total. Capitalist and laborer, employer and employed, the boss and the hired hand, are all the products of these changes in industry. "The essence of the industrial revolution," says Arnold Toynbee, "is the substitution of competition for the mediæval regulations which had previously controlled the production and distribution of wealth." It is easy to see that the problems of the unemployed, of charity, of the family, of city life, of pools, trusts, and syndicates were all produced or aggravated by these industrial changes. Now, all these complaints of the unemployed, the helpless condition of the poor, the protest of the oppressed, constitute a demand for social investigation in order that the causes of their condition may be discovered.

To the changes brought about by the advance of science and the distribution of knowledge I have already referred. Every school and college in our land is a demand for a new social order in which the larger desires and higher aspirations following increased intelligence may find means of gratification and attain-

ment, and the construction of this new social order demands a thorough understanding of the old. I may also call attention to the changes incident to the growth of democracy, the increasing disposition of the people to rule themselves. We know how blindly this disposition has manifested itself, how necessary its restraint within proper bounds. Perhaps the blundering cruelty of the French Revolution might have been averted by a better understanding of the nature of social change. Democracy itself is a demand for an increase of social knowledge.

Without dwelling further upon social changes, let us now turn our attention to some of the conditions of the present, and consider them as demands for social study. Let us take first the distribution of wealth.

Wealth is essential to the realisation of the highest character in man or nation. "It is culpable and dangerous quackery," says a recent writer,<sup>1</sup> "to conceal the fundamental necessity and the universal utility of wealth. Wealth is not the best thing in the world, but the best things get into the world with the help of wealth. Without wealth there would be neither society, nor science nor religion." Now the growing perception of the necessity and utility of wealth is increasing the dissatisfaction with our present system of distribution. According to recent estimates, twenty per cent. of the wealth of this country is in the hands of one-third hundredth of one per cent. of its population. Nine per cent. of the families in the United States own seventy-one per cent. of the wealth. It is not strange if the other ninety-one per cent. of our families, which hold only twenty-nine per cent. of the wealth, express some dissatisfaction with their share. In England conditions are little better. There is the same phenomenon, which Henry George has so vividly described—increasing poverty amid advancing wealth. Frederick Harrison, writing some years ago of conditions in England, declared that "ninety per cent. of the actual producers of wealth have no home that they can call their own, beyond the end of a week; have no bit of soil, or so much as a room that belongs to them; have nothing of value of any kind except as much old furniture as will go in a cart; have the precarious chance of weekly wages, which barely suffice to keep them in health; are housed for the most part in places that no man thinks fit for his horse; are separated by so narrow a margin from destitution that a month of bad trade, or sickness, or unexpected loss brings them face to face with hunger and pau-

<sup>1</sup>Dr. A. W. Small.

“perism.”<sup>1</sup> Do these conditions demand a fundamental change in our property relations? If so, what are the changes which are necessary to bring about equality of industrial opportunity? These are questions which can only be answered after the most careful investigation of industrial facts.

To the unequal distribution of wealth is doubtless due, in part at least, the observable tendency toward the stratification of society into social classes. We sometimes boast in this country that we are independent of caste, and it is true that there are no insurmountable barriers between different divisions of society. But at the same time it cannot be denied that the dollar's stamp is insignia of rank, and that poverty is in certain quarters a disgrace as well as an inconvenience. There is therefore sufficient cause for discouragement to those who long for the disappearance of class distinctions and the realisation of human brotherhood. “Upper tens” and social four hundreds as well as “submerged tenths” are products of abnormal conditions which demand the attention of all who would assist in the advancement of human welfare.

The unequal distribution of wealth gives rise to another modern condition to which I have already briefly referred, but which on account of its importance may again engage our attention. I refer to the prevailing popular unrest. Whatever the actual condition of the so-called laboring class with reference to its share of economic goods may be, it is an obvious fact that there is widespread discontent. This is manifested by the frequent conflicts of labor and capital, the organisation of each for protection and defence, the complaint of the many that they are not sharing equitably in the general prosperity, as well as in many other ways. The poor and oppressed are no longer ignorant of their miseries. Every day they grow more and more conscious of it. Political corruption, that hydra-headed monster which only the Hercules of aroused public sentiment can slay, is destroying hope? Is not this a condition demanding inquiry? Happily the cry of the discontented appeals to-day, more than ever before, to tender sensibilities. “Once,” says Dr. Strong, “human suffering was a matter of course, and the misery of the many was deemed the will of God; to-day all suffering is seen to imply something abnormal, and all agree that its cause must be removed.” But before its cause can be removed it must be found, and this requires observation and study. After the causes and conditions are understood, ideals must be constructed to lead men on to higher living, ideals to

<sup>1</sup> Report of Industrial Remuneration Conference, 1886, p. 429.

“shine like stars and with their mild persistence urge man’s search to vaster issues.” For it is the ideal which exerts a powerful influence on national as well as on individual character. As Mrs. Browning said, “It takes the ideal to blow a hair’s breadth off the dust of the actual.”

Having referred to a few of the changes and conditions which have produced our social problems and which constitute a demand for social study, what shall we say in regard to the condition of thought with reference to causes and remedies? It is obvious that we are in a state of intellectual anarchy. On both causes and remedies there is utter disagreement. The Church asserts confidently, and no doubt truly, that sin is the fundamental evil, and that the application of the principles of Christianity will bring peace on earth and happiness to all. But that indefinite quantity called the masses denounces the Church and declares that it does not represent Christianity; and even many who are in sympathy with the Church, and believe with Dr. Benjamin Rush that “he who shall introduce into public affairs the principles of primitive Christianity will change the face of the world,” are yet of the opinion that a statement of the efficacy of Christianity is not a solution of our difficulties, that there yet remains the great problem of how to make the principles of Christianity prevail.

As another illustration of intellectual anarchy, we may take the attitude of sentiment towards the solution of social questions, and the hostility of science to sentimental proposals. The treatment of dependent, defective and delinquent classes by well disposed people is often harmful and absurd, and it may be said that so-called scientific treatment is often equally so. There is also the antagonism between individualism and socialism: the one demanding free opportunity for individual initiative, the other insisting on the subordination of the individual to society, which shall own and control the material means of production. Where there is not actual antagonism there is variety of opinion, such for instance as is represented by the various popular beliefs which Mr. Spencer loves so well to ridicule. We all know how prevalent is the idea that to remove an evil in society all that is necessary is for the government to exert its power. A stock prescription for social ailments is “the government ought to do something,” as if happiness were the result of a majority vote and could be legislated in and out like a tariff or a financial system. Then there is another belief that all the ills of society are the result of a single evil. As to what this evil is there is constant dispute. Whether it is economic, moral, or po-



litical depends upon the particular genus of reformer who is discussing the question. Worst of all, perhaps, is the common opinion that popular judgments about society are of particular value. Social phenomena, as has often been pointed out, are the most complex with which the mind has to deal, and yet persons with no special training express unwarranted opinions about social matters and find many ready to accept them. In view of these conditions, we are justified in affirming with Dr. Ely that "careful, impartial, and scientific study of the actual facts of life is one of the most striking needs of our times."<sup>1</sup>

All the intellectual confusion to which I have referred, all the popular superstitions in regard to government, are just so many demands for more light, for the light which only impartial study can give. The social and industrial changes and conditions to which I have called attention, as well as the evils to which they give rise and the chaos of opinion in regard to causes and remedies, and especially popular discontent, have awakened an extraordinary interest in social questions, and this is itself a stimulus and a demand for social study. This interest is both academic and popular. No college curriculum can be regarded as complete without ample provision for instruction in the social sciences. Political economy, history, political science, and sociology are rapidly becoming the favorite studies in the universities of this country as well as abroad. Popular interest is manifested by the astonishing circulation of books treating of social questions. Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Kidd's *Social Evolution* have been eagerly read by all classes of people. The old periodicals are devoting more and more space to the discussion of industrial and social questions, and new ones are springing up which give attention to nothing else.

The great need of social self-knowledge has been recognised by our government. In the spring of 1893 the department of labor undertook a special investigation of the slums of great cities. The results of these investigations have helped to arouse the public conscience. The best illustration of concrete social study is, perhaps, the work of Charles Booth in London. About the time of the excitement caused by the depredations of Jack the Ripper, he began a careful study of the social conditions of East London and carried it out with remarkable thoroughness and persistence. The results were eminently practical. He showed that many fears of the people were not well grounded; that the worst quarter of London was

<sup>1</sup> *The Forum*, October, 1894.

not where it was supposed to be ; that there were plague-spots in the immediate vicinity of the homes of the rich ; in short he threw a flood of light upon all the questions that were vexing the municipality, and laid the foundation for many helpful social experiments looking toward social reform.

But I shall be misunderstood if it is thought that I would confine social study to government committees or to special students of social science. Every citizen should know the social facts of his own neighborhood, of his ward, and, so far as possible, of his city. The best way to reform society is to begin at home. Most of us are willing enough to begin with our neighbors. Perhaps our neighbors will join us in the study of local conditions ; then there can be division of labor in getting at the facts. In every community there should be a local study-club organised for the purpose of studying local conditions and with the aim of improving the community. The first task of such a club would be the observation of social facts and conditions.<sup>1</sup>

As soon as the need of social self-knowledge is generally recognised, we shall have an end of dogmatic assertions in regard to social evils, and our hopes of reform will begin to assume a rational basis. Often in the past, enthusiastic reformers confiding in favorite specifics have heralded the approach of the millennium, but the millennium has never come. A new social organisation cannot be ordered like a new suit of clothes. The changes that are to come will come as all great things have come, only in the fulness of time ; only as effects of causes long antecedent. This may not be the most encouraging doctrine. "Probably the more enthusiastic," as Herbert Spencer has said, "hopeful of great ameliorations in the state of mankind to be brought about rapidly by propagating this belief or initiating that reform will feel that a doctrine negating their sanguine anticipations takes away much of the stimulus to exertion. If large advances in human welfare can come only in the slow process of things, which will inevitably bring them, why should we trouble ourselves? Doubtless it is true," he continues, "that on visionary hopes rational criticisms have a depressing influence. It is better to recognise the truth however. As between infancy and maturity there is no short cut by which there may be avoided the tedious process of growth and development through insensible increments so there is no way from the lower forms of social life to the higher, but

<sup>1</sup> In the *American Journal of Sociology*, May, July, and September numbers, 1897, the present writer published a programme for social study with suggestions designed for such clubs.

“one passing through small successive modifications. . . . Admitting that for the fanatic some wild anticipation is needful as a stimulus, and recognising the usefulness of his delusion as adapted to his particular nature, and his particular function, the man of higher type must be content with greatly modulated expectations while he perseveres with undiminished efforts. He has to see how comparatively little can be done and yet find it worth while to do that little : So uniting philanthropic energy with philosophic calm.”<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Spencer may have stated this doctrine a little too strongly, as if there were no possibility of hastening progress, but at all events his words are a good antidote to unwarranted expectations in regard to social reform. It is no doubt disappointing to be told that we need expect no immediate solution of social problems, that the student of social science cannot begin by advancing correct solutions of the labor problem or of other social questions which vex mankind. That would be interesting perhaps to the student but not very profitable to society. We must begin at the beginning. When in our school days we began the study of arithmetic, we found it necessary to begin with addition and subtraction, however alluring were the “One Hundred Problems” in the back of the book. So in the study of society, although we are just beginning to realise it, the solution of problems must follow the acquirement of principles. Only by beginning with the simpler facts and principles may we hope at last to reach a solution of the social problem. Such a beginning will be fruitful in results. “Only let the hard study,” says President Andrews, “which the last two generations have bestowed on physical science be applied for the next two generations on social science, and the result may be, if not Heaven, at least a tolerable earth.”

To say nothing more of the social value of such study as I have described, let me call attention in conclusion to the personal value of such study. Social study draws us away from ourselves and our own selfish interests and concentrates our attention upon the conditions, the trials and struggles, the expectations, the disappointments, the joys, the hopes, the fears, the aspirations and the needs of others, the lives and interests of other people who, like ourselves, are here in the world, as Epictetus said, like travellers on an ocean voyage anchored by an island and gone ashore for a few moments to gather a few shells by the way, yet ever listening for the call of the captain when we must forsake all things and run

<sup>1</sup> *Study of Sociology*, p. 403.

to the ship. To say nothing of new information and mental discipline, culture of the head, such study ought to cultivate the heart, to enlarge our affections and to stimulate our sympathy which after all is the main bond of human society. When the mind is informed and the heart is warmed our hands will not long remain inactive, but will apply themselves to the work of making others happy, to filling life with the splendor of generous deeds, to scattering the seeds of joy and hope which by and by will spring up and blossom into beauty and fragrance where now all is darkness and despair. And thus shall we increasingly enjoy the "sweet luxury of doing good," or, as George Eliot expressed it,

". . . . reach  
 That purest Heaven, be to other souls  
 The cup of strength in some great agony,  
 Enkindle generous ardor, feed pure love,  
 Beget the smiles that have no cruelty,  
 Be the sweet presence of a good diffused  
 And in diffusion evermore intense."

The value of social study is therefore not to be measured alone by its contributions to the sum of knowledge about society, to the amount of information about local conditions, but also by its influence in stimulating the growth of altruistic feeling, by its enlargement of manhood and womanhood, and by its power to assist in drawing the members of society more closely together and uniting them in bonds of mutual understanding, of fellowship and of sympathy. This alone, to say nothing of the advantages already alluded to, renders social study desirable. The present demand for the personal qualities which it encourages, and the fact that without widely diffused knowledge of the facts and relations of society progress must be exceedingly slow, justify the claim that the scientific study of social life by the largest possible number of our citizens is a great and genuine social need.