

Social Improvement

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Social Improvement.

Early Society

Social Principles

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Object

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Growth of the Settlements

From the earliest history of society we find a tendency for men to band themselves together for the protection of themselves and their families; and these primitive forms of society have grown up and survived simply because they increased the efficiency of man as a feeding and fighting animal, just as it did that of the wolf, the bear and other animals. Society has now grown to be for man the indispensable guarantee not only of nutrition and protection, but of the opportunity to conceive and attain a thousand varieties of more refined satisfaction.

Thus we find society starting from the union of a few families who worked together for mutual benefit, and who have grown, and conquered every other form of life until today man stands far in advance of all other beings. But from the beginning we find certain principles and responsibilities which society has been forced to respect. These principles are not arbitrary they are not a matter merely conventional, born of compact, or moulded by individual or popular caprice. Social life may be a Proteus in its form. It may wrap itself in the furs of the savage or the silks of the civilized man; it may breathe amid splendid palaces or be halfstifled in caverns, but the principles that vivify and sustain it are invariably the same. For the interests of a commonwealth are paramount to all private interests, and a common responsibility is the mutual bond that unites its

members together. The very idea of social life implies restraint of private impulses. There is no such a thing as a perfect individualism, for the individual is 'a thread in the fabric, a fiber in the common trunk. The conditions of man from the very beginning to the close of his life show his responsibilities to others. The first breath he draws introduces him to a social world and the last gasp on his death bed, witnessed by survivors, consigns the care of his very dust to them as a social duty. No social order is possible without the confessed and constant recognition of a moral basis. No Utopia of speculation could present even a consistent ideal, except a that feature of mutual and moral obligation is interwoven in it. Thus we find that the strongest form of society demands a moral code; it demands order and government, and it demands the constant recognition of the obligation growing out of mutual relations: and it allows no man, be he skeptic, atheist or libertarian to ignore them. As a member of the social body his position is defined and his duties are prescribed. His sovereignty of himself, even if he denies that of God, is not absolute. So far as he has attained freedom to do and be as he desires, he has attained it only through the evolution of society.

We can thus see the dependency of the individual upon society for his existence, but the trouble that

arises from our present social system is the division which takes place in it. Some by scheming and plotting have become possessed of a large amount of wealth, while others through a long series of misfortunes have been lowered to the very depth of poverty. It is between these classes that the greatest social wrongs exist. The rich are apt to look upon the poor as a necessary evil and applying the law of the survival of the fittest to them, turn their attention to methods of increasing their already enormous wealth, while the poor class unable to rise without the help of a friendly hand, are compelled to eke out their miserable existence in the best way possible.

In America we have not had these social inequalities so well developed, for the high pressure under which Americans exist is an indirect result of their free institutions, and the absence of those class-distinctions and restraints existing in older countries. A society in which a man who dies a millionaire is so often a man who began life in poverty. But as the country began to be settled up, and the poorer class of immigrants continued to pour into our cities, and as the wealth of the country became controlled by a few the social question became one of growing importance. The erection of large manufactories in the cities has drawn large crowds of people to the cities to seek employment. The people

who secure work in the factories are able to live on their income, but they must work every day from morning till night, and if for any reason they are thrown out of work they are soon on the verge of starvation. Poor foreigners come to this country who have barely money enough to pay their passage here and when they land they crowd into some tenement district of our cities where they manage to get food enough to exist on. In this way the tenements of our large cities are overcrowded and greedy land-lords increase the size of their buildings without improving the sanitary conditions, and four families are crowded in the space suitable for one. In New York we find houses built on lots twenty five feet wide by one hundred deep, with apartments for four families in each story. The middle rooms are poorly lighted and badly ventilated. Life under such conditions has evil effects of many kinds. Children are thrown into the vilest of society; and besides the bad society and crowded quarters the tenement houses are breeding grounds for disease germs and the death rate in these quarters is very high.

Within the last few years various movements have been started to improve the quarters and conditions of these poor. The starting point of these movements has been the conviction of the inherent worth of a human being; and their goal is to secure the recognition of that

worth in all departments of life. We see that there is a strong social feeling existing among the people. How quickly their sympathies are aroused by the account of the suffering in our large cities, the misery of those left destitute by famine or disaster. Society is no longer satisfied with the teachings of the political economist who says that this is the struggle for existence and that suffering works out the greatest good in the end; or that the people are very low and sordid and desire nothing better. All these theories are being swept away and a movement is being started to create new conditions. It is sought to give the children of the poor their share in our intellectual heritage by providing universal elementary education and guarding these rights by laws and customs. As the ancients astrologer studied the movement of the planets, and their relation to each other; in order that he might deduce the principles by which the solar system is governed so the sociologist is today studying the movement of the daily life about him in order to prove the laws which control human progress. In order to do this they have gone among the poor and lived among them and studied the conditions under which they live. From this has grown the social settlements which are today doing such good work among the poor of the cities.

The Social Settlement was started in England

in 1867 when a few undergraduates of Oxford University began to spend a portion of their vacation in the Whitechapel district of London and endeavored to improve the conditions of the people in that locality by creating a more brotherly feeling among the inhabitants and encouraging them to improve their homes and surroundings. Arnold Toynbee, one of the Oxford students, became so interested in the work in the Whitechapel district that he dropped his studies at the University and devoted the whole of his time to the work; and as a result of his efforts a large hall was erected in 1885 which was called Toynbee Hall in his honor. This hall is now a meeting place for all classes of society where the poorest most ignorant and impoverished meet together with the university and professional men who follow Toynbee's foot steps.

The first settlement opened in America was by Dr. Stanton Coit and is known as Delancey Street University Settlement of New York City. The characteristic of this settlement is that of self government of the people of the neighborhood through well organized clubs, and the generation of local patriotism which is making itself felt in everything which touches the interest of the neighborhood. We find that the importance of such social organizations among individuals too ignorant to know their own rights,

is being more and more recognized; and the social settlements have extended until there are seven well organized settlements in New York at the present time.

The second settlement in this country was established in Chicago and is known as Hull House. This house was founded by two young women who were interested in social work and who had carefully studied the work done by Toynbee. They believed that the opening of a home easily accessible, ample in space, hospitable and tolerant in spirit; situated in the midst of the large foreign colonies which are separated from the rest of the world in the large cities, would be a means of improving the community. Hull House was opened on the theory that the dependency of classes on each other is reciprocal, and it is a positive effort to add the social function to democracy. Since the establishment of Hull House it has continued to grow in favor with the people until today it has a very extensive influence in the daily life of the district, and since its establishment there have been six more settlements opened in Chicago.

In Boston we find a similar settlement known as the South End House Association. This house stands in the midst of a working class district of Boston. It is surrounded by the tenement houses of factory hands and cheap lodging houses; while the whole district is the dwelling place of a large portion of the poor.

population of that city. This settlement has for its aim to bring about a better and more beautiful life in its neighborhood, to develop thought, study, and action, and to find new ways of meeting some of the serious problems of society. The work is carried on by a staff of workers who reside at the House. At first the children of the neighborhood were organized into groups, and each group had a leader who served as guide, philosopher, and friend. Then clubs were organized for men and women, where questions of interest are discussed and lectures are delivered. A reading room is also in connection and here the latest papers and magazines can be read by all the members. So great is the influence of this settlement among all classes of society that the House is used as a kind of neutral ground at the boundary line which separates the working classes from other classes. Here the business men and professional men can meet the trade union men with perfect freedom from restraint on both sides. Every time such a meeting has occurred at the House there has been an increase of mutual understanding and respect.

Along with the establishment of these social settlements we find the establishment of sociological departments in some of our most prominent universities, where the social conditions and the causes

which lead to these conditions are studied.

Although the social improvement is comparatively a new movement we can already see the good effects of its work and; and prominent men and women are becoming interested in the work and are devoting their time and money to it. Of course it is not expected that such work would appeal to any theorist who has his own cure for all social ills ready-made, and who would rather see the patient die than have him relieved according to any other formula than his own. But people who have the good of society at heart are beginning to work, and soon we may hope to see far greater results.