

Book Review

THE FARMERS IN POLITICS.

THE FARMERS IN POLITICS—By William Irvine. McClelland & Stewart, Toronto. Cloth. 253 pages.

THIS book has two points of interest to Canadians, which fortunately are met with in the first seven pages. It is printed in Canada and Dr. Bland in the foreword tells us that he questions "if a more constructive and distinctively Canadian contribution has yet been thrown into the discussion of our national problems."

These are great and fundamental truths and, if merely to announce them to a world thirsty for knowledge the book is worth while. The average reader might object to reading over one-third of its 253 pages ere meeting with more than a casual mention of the "critic" the book is written about. When he does finally encounter the farmer in politics he is liable to become even more censorious, especially so if he has parted with cash and is seeking information. At that the title might be a sales factor, though a dozen others would better describe the contents.

It is very evidently a 'prentice effort, and starts out bravely enough, though somewhat clogged with simile and metaphor; but we soon stub the toes of our understanding upon metaphysical bricks, hidden among flowery and scientific phrases, such as—"Eternal truth refined as gold by fire, will stand every test."

On page 35 we discover much to our concern that "the price of wheat must be fixed when it starts to go up (so that the farmer may not benefit by the advance), while the price of machinery necessary to farming is fixed only when it starts to go down (again, so that the farmer may not benefit by the decrease)." (Emphasis in the original).

No wonder the farmer gets riled. We are further to understand that religion is again a factor for progress, not in its theological aspect of course, but as "a new social appeal which indicates a reinterpretation of that deeper spiritual truth for which religion stands." Not the religion of yesterday, which no doubt reflected individualism, and necessarily so, not the religion of "other worldism," but the "social application of Christian principles." "There is a new note sounding from the pulpits," etc. Quite a lot of this on pp. 51-55, which, remembering our author is a parson, we may pass without too deep scrutiny. We know that some parsons are saying daring things to their congregations. But we would to God these persons would read the sources of their "Christian Principles," and understand that any variation to the church practice of yesterday is away from them and not toward them.

Mr. Irvine remarks how easy it is to worship God in church, "But it is not so easy to worship God in a factory or on a lonely homestead." Between this fact, brother, and the bankruptcy of Christianity, there might be some connection. Because Christianity was, is, and ever shall be, in essence, a slave's creed. Anyone who seeks to effect the betterment of slaves must do so outside the principles of Christianity. And further, anyone found worshipping God in a factory would soon be looking for a new master, if not for a new God.

Taking the first part, which deals with "The New Social Order in Perspective," and which forms almost half of the book—it is readable and connected, when dealing in a narrative fashion with political happenings and graft, but immediately any attempt is made to deal with the "New Social Order" we struggle and toil through involved sentences, partly digested and often wholly erroneous scientific findings. An excursion is made into psychology to shew that people are either conservative or progressive: "Both types are indispensable to progress The two are inseparable. Without the conservative element, we would not only be in danger of going back, but we would never develop sufficiently by practice to be prepared for the next step; while without the progressives, society would become static and decadent." p. 60. Just

what is meant we are unable to grasp. The argument is concerned with the party system of politics, and it is well argued that so far as the rank and file of the dominant political parties are concerned, they have no definite reason for their alignment; the principal determining factor being birth and association. They follow the lead of the wealthy sections of society, who determine the policy of the party. We should, then, abjure the party system, and develop the group system. Now we are introduced to Herbert Spencer who, in his "First Principles" traces the evolutionary principle from the simple to the complex "with a thoroughness which carries conviction." Mr. Irvine says: "This evolutionary principle operates in the political realm just as it does in the physical, and that man is blind who cannot see it. . . . failure to recognize this has brought both Canada and Great Britain to the verge of bloody revolution." We admit being blind, stone blind in this matter, because Spencer gives the evolutionary principle as a dissipation of motion and a concomitant integration of matter, and that generally, though not always, the direction is from the simple to the complex or, as he prefers to express it, from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous. We might as well say that failure to recognize this principle has forced the snake to crawl on his belly and man to walk on his legs. But can Mr. Irvine or any other self-styled Spencerian connote the change from Czarist bureaucracy to workers' Soviet as being a change from the simple to the complex?—to take but the latest social development. And in what respect is Canada on the verge of a bloody revolution? In the light of the trials at Winnipeg, and other working-class matters, such stupidity, if it be stupidity, cannot be too severely condemned.

Let us pass over the various groupings of parliamentary parties in various countries to another scientific principle:

"The indestructibility of anything that exists is an acknowledged fact of physical science. What passed for destruction with the superficial witness, however, is but the changing of form, or the passing from one state of existence to another. I maintain that this principle of indestructibility is no less true when applied to thought or to the institutions of society, than it is in physics, and that, if this truth were fully realized, governments would no longer attempt by suppression and persecution to destroy new thoughts and new systems; neither would radicals act as though old systems should be destroyed in order to make way for a new."

It certainly is discouraging, as Mr. Irvine goes on to tell us, "that human history has failed to teach this lesson more widely especially as it is written on every page." This is a comfortable doctrine, and is carried along on such illuminating maxims as "truth cannot be destroyed." "Every reformer should abolish the term 'destruction' from his vocabulary." "They who come to destroy come to do the impossible," etc., etc.

It is discouraging that this great lesson of history has not been properly taught. How different, then, would have been the sentiment of the Amaligantes, when subjected to the tender mercies of the chosen people of God. How would the Carthaginian mothers have whispered to their starving babes that the Romans could not "destroy" them but merely change them from laughing, crowing infants, into wolf meat. How joyfully would the Albigensians have received the spears, battleaxes and arrows of De Montfort's Christian warriors, or Torquemado's victims blessed that human tiger as he transformed them from sound, sane heretics to hung, drawn, sawn, burned, bleeding, broken and converted crow's meat. The pregnant negro mother disembowelled by an insensate Christian mob; the doomed workers of famine stricken Russia—but why continue—was ever scientific formula used to such an idiotic purpose? The theory of conservation of energy and its resultant indestructibility of matter applied to cosmic processes, and understood to be so applied, is vital to a proper understanding of the universe, but to apply it to human affairs, either social or individual, shows a mind unschooled in science. Destruction is everywhere, blighting, blasting, brutal—of things—not of matter. Spencer's "First Principles" contains an illuminating chapter on this very subject.

It is not wise to take too seriously any analogy we might make to aid our arguments; this Mr. Ir-

vine is guilty of doing frequently, but in justice let us grant that in some instances the lapse is but temporary, as per p. 141:—

"Strange as it may seem, competition itself is the father of co-operation, for competition when carried to a certain point becomes so destructive as to leave co-operation the only alternative to annihilation."

Or again, (p. 143):—

"The destructiveness of modern warfare is such that even the victor loses." (Emphasis ours).

History fares no better than science. We are told to observe "the farmer, like Cincinnatus leaving his plough for the legislative hall." Now that which made Cincinnatus famous was just the reverse. He quit the Dictatorship of Rome at a time when it was particularly dangerous to do so, and returned to the simple life on his Sabine farm.

But we must hurry to the Farmer in Politics. On page 105, under heading of "Economic Necessity" our author asks us a number of questions, all about the farmers' organization; questions which we could well expect him to answer, but which he declines on the ground that to do so would necessitate his writing a book. This we are willing to accept as a proper, valid, and ever-to-be-lauded excuse; so he refers us to Mr. Hopkins Moorhouse's novel "Deep Furroughs," for the information we might with justice expect to find in his own book. However, instead, we are treated to a disquisition on the manner in which Canada should have been settled. Coming from an advocate of social laws and their necessary operation, we conceive our author is not consistent. Well then, railroads were built into far off territory while Ontario could very well accommodate the population, to the end that (p. 113) "the farmer lost the price of freight on the selling price of his wheat, and had to pay the freight on all machinery and other commodities necessary to his life on the farm." Ain't that a shame! But on page 112 we find still further trouble, "all he" (the farmer) "could do was to pay what was asked and take what was given," and again (page 145) "He" (again, the farmer) "had to pay what was asked and take what was offered." This book is peculiar like that; you go reading along, and suddenly you find the same words which assailed your eyes some chapters or pages back,—you fancy you have turned back instead of forward.

But no, dear reader, should you ever read the book be assured you are proceeding ever forward though apparently going backward.

Leaving the farmer, then, paying the freight both ways, let us hurry along. Economic necessity is the subject of discussion, so listen:

"People do not respond to a bread and butter appeal unless starvation stares them in the face. In the absence of bread and butter, bread and butter, of course, is the ideal. Necessities, however, once secured, it then becomes true that man does not live by bread alone; but not until then. It is chiefly for this reason that Marxian Socialism as frequently misrepresented, has met with small success."

Mr. Irvine evidently has small acquaintance with Marx, and struggles manfully with this weighty subject, but in vain. Economic necessity, whatever it may mean, finally turns to a discussion of home life on the farm; not a happy subject, it is true, albeit one which is better suited to our author's limited knowledge. We are told that man in his earliest life engaged in a Hobbesian war, each against each; later, reason dawned, and the tribe resulted, because reason suggested co-operation; competition then arose between tribes, these in turn became a people, and the people grew into the nation. Nations in competition again forced man to still further co-operate and, "The League of Nations is the birth of the idea in its national aspect." (pp. 142-143).

In this development which, up to a point, is "little better than a mob," "The strongest or the most cunning of the herd became the ruler." This ruler was the only individual left, all others disappeared in the mob; then the mob revolted, the individual was lost entirely,

"And so mob rule, or what is commonly called democracy, emerged. The mob still required rulers, of course—and so elected them. The principle difference between the first and second cases was that in the first, the ruler ruled without votes, by his own strength or cunning; while in the second the people voted for and chose their ruler, whose rule thereafter reposed on popular, or "mob" consent."

(Continued on Page 7)