

E.W.F. Wec. 3-09.

THE RELATION OF SCIENTIFIC METHOD TO SOCIAL PROGRESS.

AMONG those subjects which are not always correctly apprehended, even by educated men, we may place that of the true significance of scientific method, and the relations of such method to practical affairs. This is especially apt to be the case in a country like our own, where the points of contact between the scientific world on the one hand, and the industrial and political world on the other, are fewer than in other civilized countries. The form which this misapprehension usually takes is that of a failure to appreciate the character of scientific method, and, especially its analogy to the methods of practical life. In the judgment of the ordinary intelligent man there is a wide distinction between theoretical and practical science. The latter he considers as that science directly applicable to the building of railroads, the construction of engines, the invention of new machinery, the construction of maps, and other useful objects. The former he considers analogous to those philosophic speculations in which men have indulged in all ages without leading to any result which he considers practical. That our knowledge of nature is increased by its prosecution is a fact of which he is quite conscious, but he considers it as terminating with a mere increase of knowledge, and not as having in its method anything which a person devoted to material interests can be expected to appreciate.

This view is strengthened by the spirit with which he sees scientific investigation prosecuted. It is well understood on all sides that when such investigations are pursued in a spirit really recognized as scientific, no merely utilitarian object is had in view. Indeed it is easy to see how the very fact of pursuing such an object would detract from that thoroughness of examination which is the first condition of a real advance. True science demands in its every research a completeness far beyond what is apparently necessary for its practical applications. The precision with which the astronomer seeks to measure the heavens, and the chemist to determine the relations of the ultimate molecules of matter has no limit, except that set by the imperfections of the instruments of