

Book Review

The Iron Man of Industry. By Arthur Pound. The Atlantic Monthly Press.

THE author of this book considers that as a rule writers on industrial problems or such as he is acquainted with are either "coldly analytical or hotly polemical," and he undertakes "a calm synthesis." We can say without reserve he has succeeded. It is calm, and in the strict dictionary meaning of the word a synthesis—putting together.

Everything that has cropped up in the past half century is "put together"—materialist conception, great man theory, religious interpretation of history, instincts, complexes—superior and inferior,—morons, defectives, effectives, blonds and brunettes, profit-sharing, paternal and joint management, searching out God, the entire bag of tricks, as Burns has it:

In formless jumble right and wrang,
Wild wandered through his bedm.

Happily, the materialist conception of history comes first, and as the Babbitts rarely read far into a work of this character we venture to hope that this point of view will find entrance, through the medium of this book, into minds which otherwise would be forever closed against it.

The first chapter sketches the development of mankind in terms of the tool: "First, the man and the beast; then, the man and the hand tool; now, the man and the machine-tool;" and, "This is the century of the automatic machine." With such a start we presumed this book well worth reading. The automatic machine broke up labor unions which had become a power in the land. It caused the cities to expand by first driving the men from the land, and then furnishing jobs for them in the cities. It reduced skill to mere automatic or, a better term, acrobatic stunt. So, where before its advent a term of apprenticeship was essential, now a few hours' instruction at most is necessary, and a few day's practice completes the "mechanic." Thus the boy or girl fresh from the country can be readily absorbed by the Iron Man. Our author traces many manners generally ascribed to chivalry or perversity to the Iron Fellow. When the farmer's boy left the country in such numbers as would tend to elevate the wage of those remaining, the farmer's girl donned overalls and worked the crops. "Not chivalry but economics had dictated their previous immunity from field labor; our prejudices against such work did not stand the economic test." This machine also tends to that abhorrent condition charged against socialism, equalization of reward. Wages tend to a common level. "A city engineering department can hire draughtsmen about as cheaply as common labor" (p. 25), so "the Socialist dream—equality of income" results from the automatic machinery owned by Capitalists. (p. 33).

Another task reserved for Socialism since time was,—the breaking up of the home,—has been accomplished by the machine. "The army of homeless, wifeless men and foot-loose women is growing, the automatic tool has cut marriage knots as well as steel bars," (p. 34)

Chapter III on Mind and the Machine is a characteristic piece of pedlar's logic. We are told that the machine needs hands and feet to tend it, with an eye and ear once in a while, but unhappily the only creature possessing these appendages has an aggregation of other organs, heart, brain, kidneys, liver, lights, to mention a few. These be bad enough but he also has "endocrinal glands," terrible things which somehow make tedious work torture. Now the machine has no use for this plethora of offal but is required to take it with the hand, foot, and occasional eye, hence complications arise. Aside from the exaggerated value given by the la-de-da investigators of labor troubles to what we may term the liver and lights complexion of industry, it is most disconcerting to find at the end of the chapter another explanation, entirely at variance with this physiological stuff. We read (p. 52) that the fellow who mans the machine and even the superintendent

is a moron, sixteen years old intellectually by test. The man who owns the machine is, of course, fully developed intellectually. The common man is a moron, yet the machine has no ill effects on the moron (p. 53); the evils which the average man suffers while operating it are disquieting (p. 45).

Whatever else might be said of the "common man," he could not by Benit test, or any other, betray a lighter regard for common sense than is shown here. As to the man who owns the machine being intellectually above the man who uses it, that is just plain ordinary nonsense.

No Benit test is required to appraise the mentality of the average owner, as evidenced by the speeches which he pays for, and pays for well, and listens to at his weekly dinners. What is more, the methods whereby such agencies as the Pinkerton and Burns blackmailed them for years, is complete proof not only of their intellectual bankruptcy but that so far as "guts" are concerned they have not developed beyond the intertidal scum, (which our author supposes is a theory of Wells and is opposed to Darwinism (see p. 39).

Inconsistency however does not worry Mr. Pound. While asserting "ability heads toward power" (p. 63) a few pages further on we are told that the decisions of the mighty are commonly made through their emotions, reason being used after success comes to justify their action. Hill was a dreamer of dreams. "Colt clung to his idea of a revolving pistol after other men gave theirs up, because he was more obstinate than they, not because he had better reasoning faculties" (p. 69). As a matter of fact both were guilty of bribing the law dreamer of dreams. "Colt clung to his idea of a redreams. The poetic nonsense our author indulges in about this old rascal is quite up to the hero-worship he ascribes to the common man." Hill's nearest friends, those who helped him complete the wreck of railroads Russel Sage had partially looted, considered him the meanest scoundrel alive, and a liar to boot; and the thousands he ruined, and his low paid and non-union railroads will long remember his corruption of legislators, and truckling to Roman Catholic priests. All this is recorded in the court records of Federal and State trials.

There's a lot of slush about Iron Dukes and nature's sons which helps to fill the book and might convince the Babbitts who gather at their weekly dinners to hear just that kind of sentimental moonshine, but our author sees these men rapidly disappearing, and instead of your old school-fellow for a boss you have "them Jews of Wall Street." ("Them Jews" forsooth).

Too bad! Little Billy with whom we were wont to frequent the old swimming hole, both sucking the same lollipop, is no longer our boss; Wall Street pirates grabbed his plant; Billy was too generous with the boys, called them by their first name, paid top wages. The new boss cuts wages and calls them by a number, so, Tom, Dick and Harry are full of mental poison. "Them Jews" now control and the contentment of Stilltown is departed forever, or until the boys are ready to follow the new boss. Our author thinks this is nonsense,—we concur,—it barely skims the surface and is purely a business man's view of how labor feels. His foot of twine will never fathom the worker's mind.

Yes indeed, "Life and human nature are primary; civilization and industry are secondary to them and cannot be maintained unamended much longer than the masses find worth while. He who forgets this elemental fact builds his theories upon the sand; the state which does not reckon with it at every turn is preparing for revolution" (p. 89). Apart from the metaphors this is fundamental, but ere long we find our mentor completely forgets his own teaching. Ere we proceed to that, however, let us take up one more example of ill-digested knowledge. "Political history reveals a never-ending conflict between mass and class for the control of the state's political machinery. In a democracy the conflict may be considered as resolved in favor of the mass, in theory, if not always in practice." So far so good; mark what follows: "The very existence of the state is, indeed, a triumph for the common man; the institution is his champion against ob-

jective and effective alike; the state is his and he made it." But what can we expect from a defective, a moron, an intellectual diminutive, who can seriously praise the Canadian Industrial Disputes Act and the Kansas Industrial Court and account them of value "in continuous corporate functioning." Neither Act has ever prevented a strike where either party had the economic advantage and an adverse legal award.

However, it is not our intention to follow Mr. Pound through his entire mass of contradictions. He mentions Butler's machinate mammal, and has no doubt read Erewhon, that masterly satire on the human animal; but if Butler had considered it proper to give us a translation from the works of one of the Professors of Inconsistency from the College of Unreason in Erewhon, he could hardly have improved upon Mr. Pound.

Truth is stranger than fiction.

Let us then turn to the last chapter, headed God and Man, and pass over even half of that. On page 225 we read: "The most durable bond that man has yet succeeded in discovering is belief in God. The fact that one can write indefinitely long of industry and make no mention of God may be at the root of more of our industrial and social trouble than we imagine." After rejecting all the known gods, even that of H. G. Wells, he says that at one time he believed man made god in his own image—"For all I know to the contrary," he adds, "this may be the case; but if man did invent god, I hold that invention to be the masterpiece of human wisdom, far-out-stripping in usefulness any and all subsequent innovations of the brave little biped. That, if so, was the first slip in progress from beasthood toward manhood, the essential without which self restraint and social order are impossible." We cannot quote further, though the temptation is great. God and back in the minds of the workers will accomplish wonders, the "endoctrinal gland" notwithstanding.

We can understand Mr. Pound when he introduces his god, even, as he says, if invented as a measure of "self restraint and social order." A sort of big policeman, beyond the reach of political or partizan influence. But in the closing passage of his book he forgets that he invented this monster for disciplinary purposes and appeals to it for guidance. It is almost unbelievable that anyone could get into such a ridiculous position, and we are inclined to regard these closing words as pure propaganda and absolve Mr. Pound from actual belief in them: "In escaping from one sort of travail man runs straightway into another. Consequently whatever the trend or pace of evolution, man needs Divine assistance toward wisdom and patience in order to emerge strong and serene from the struggle with the iron man."

What a lame and impotent conclusion to such an auspicious beginning! Not, as he said then, in an understanding of social laws, but in communion with an invented deity lies our salvation.

But Mr. Pound gives his case away when he says that any solution short of the abolition of the wage system would have his wholehearted support. There are many like him. But it cannot be done. Whenever Divine assistance has been invoked the result has been even more pitiful than Mr. Pound's absurd effort, and that is saying a great deal.

This book is but one more example of the stark stupidity which poses as and passes for wisdom.

It is hardly incumbent on us to point out that if human testimony has any value, the belief in God has restrained mankind from little, and that little of trifling moral value, but on the other hand has urged him to the foulest practices known. So much so that a very substantial basis is given to the theory held in some places that it is responsible for all the evils we suffer from. We need but mention the Salem Witches to go no further back. J. H.

WINNIPEG, MAN.

Local Winnipeg, Manitoba. Secretary J. M. Sanderson, P. O. Box 2354, Winnipeg, Man.

Business meeting every Wednesday at 8 p.m. Economics Class every Monday at 8 p.m. Correspondence invited. When visiting Winnipeg visit the Local Headquarters at 530 Main Street.