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Visionaries Encourage Progress of World.

By JAMES W. THOMPSON.



WHAT is the function of the Utopian philosopher? He cannot hold the mirror up to nature, as can the dramatist, for the society he portrays has not its like in the earth. He is an encourager of progress. He teaches men that they may "rise on stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things." Or, in the admirable words of Mr. Hobson, "If we are to take a scientific view of human efforts and satisfaction, such as shall furnish a basis of social reform, we must have a social ideal constructed of human facts and human possibilities, but transcending existing facts and furnishing a test for conduct."

The French philosopher, August Comte, in the middle of the last century, thought that Utopian literature was a species of inventive art likely to be much employed. Every great political change, he claimed, had been ushered in one or two centuries beforehand by some corresponding Utopia which he defined as "the esthetic genius of humanity working under an imperfect sense of the circumstances and requirements of the case." Ideal politics, then, teach men to hope for and to strive after a better order of things. The practical value of cherishing a social or political ideal is that the ideal becomes a standard of judgment of the actual, a criterion of conduct, a source of inspiration.

The cherishing of an ideal has a practical value. Without ideals the future would hang before men in tatters. It will never do to attempt to draw the line sharply between the ideal and what the man-in-the-street may coldly regard as "practical." Witness Robert Owen, who established in England the ideals of a first rate business man, and Lord Shaftesbury, the "organizer of social sympathy." The relation of the social ideal to any existing social condition is this: that the ideal is latent in the actual. The unapprehended aspirations of one age may become the realization of the next. The mission of the idealist is that of the prophet and the poet.

The moral standard is determined by social requirements. The criminal or "unsocial individual," to use the technical language of the sociologist, who regards crime as a pathological manifestation, adheres to standards below the plane of the people among whom he lives and upon whom he preys. The re-

former holds to standards in advance of the existing order of things. The moral standard always transcends the existing state of things, else there would be no progress. The need to promote the advancement of moral, social, political ideas is, therefore, the function of the Utopian philosopher, the duty of the dreamer. The ideal state of society implies harmonious relation between the highest degree of social intelligence and the perfect adjustment of social tasks. These two conditions are logically and morally inseparable. Primarily, social questions are ones of conscience and method.

There is a wide difference between old fashioned Utopias, like Plato's "republic" or More's "Utopia," and modern Utopian literature. With few exceptions, modern Utopias deal with natural society. The Utopias of ancient days dealt with an imaginary or artificial society. But this difference is not all. Lieber in his work on civil liberty has made the keen observation that "nearly all political writers who had indulged in creative Utopias" (he was writing fifty years ago) had "followed so closely the ancient writers that they rose no higher than communism." In other words, until recent years, political and social visionaries, though they look towards the future, steered by the stars of the ancient world, heedless of the fact that even stars of the first magnitude may become insignificant lights in the firmament in the course of ages.

Utopian ideals may not be a feasible method of bettering society, but Utopian ideals certainly will always be in the moral world what oxygen and nitrogen, salt and water are in material nature—the saving elements. The present expectations of the historian and the sociologist do not look ahead for a Utopia like that of More, or Plato, or Campanella. But scientific, progressive reform, enough to stir men to larger action, transcending human conditions as they now exist, but not divorced from them, may be the common meeting ground for co-operative work by both conservative and radical, the matter of fact and the dreamer, the practical man and the doctrinaire. This is, in fact, the highest sort of practical politics. As Huxley said, "The organization of society upon a new and purely scientific basis is not only practicable, but it is the only political object much worth fighting for." Have we no need ever of the eternal vigilance of the political dreamer to make us beware lest we backslide, or, in sloth, lose our real liberty?

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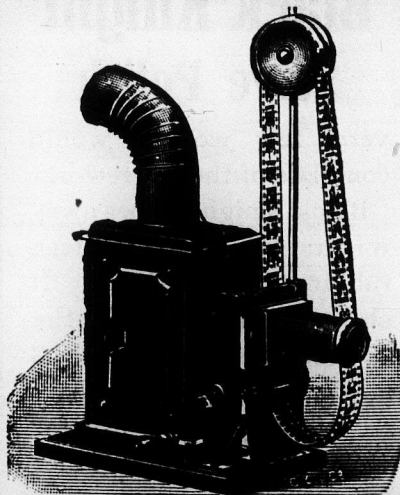
The man who comes to cut the grass
And hoes the vines to make them grow
Has one eye that is made of glass,
It's not for seeing out of, though,
And straight ahead's the only way
His glass eye ever seems to look;
He has a goatee that is gray
And one hand that's an iron hook.

He came away across the sea,
Almost a million miles, I bet,
And has to talk in signs to me,
Because he can't speak English yet;
But one day when our cook went out,
All dressed up fine and lookin' proud
And saw a toad and gave a shout,
He laughed in English, right out loud.

And one time, when the wasps had made
A nest above the kitchen door,
He got the ladder and the spade
And gave a jab and then some more.
The wasps lit on him and he fell—
He came from foreign lands, you know,
And can't talk English—you could tell
That he was mad in English, though.

—S. E. Kiser.

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