

SOCIAL EVOLUTION

BY

BENJAMIN KIDD

NEW EDITION WITH A NEW PREFACE

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SOCIAL EVOLUTION



PREFACE TO THE SECOND AMERICAN EDITION

ONE of the most remarkable epochs in the history of human thought is that through which we have passed in the last half of the nineteenth century. The revolution which began with the application of the doctrines of evolutionary science, and which received its first great impetus with the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, has gradually extended in scope until it has affected the entire intellectual life of our Western civilisation. One after the other we have seen the lower sciences revived, reconstructed, transformed by the new knowledge. The sciences dealing with man in society have naturally been the last to be affected, but now that the movement has reached them the changes therein promise to be even more startling in character. History, economics, the science of politics, and, last but not least important, the attitude of science to the religious life and the religious phenomena of mankind, promise to be profoundly influenced. The whole plan of life is, in short, being slowly revealed to us in a new light, and we are beginning to perceive that it presents a single majestic unity, throughout every part of which the conditions of law and orderly progress reign supreme.

Nothing is more remarkable in this period of recon-

struction than the change which is almost imperceptibly taking place in the minds of the rising generation respecting the great social and religious problem of our time. We have lived through a period when the very foundations of human thought have been rebuilt. To many who in the first stage saw only the confusion occasioned by the moving of old landmarks, the time has been one of perplexity and changing hope. But those whose lot it has been to come later have already an inspiring and uplifting conception of the character of the work which the larger knowledge is destined eventually to accomplish. That the moral law is the unchanging law of progress in human society is the lesson which appears to be written over all things. No school of theology has ever sought to enforce this teaching with the directness and emphasis which it appears that evolutionary science will in the future be justified in doing. In the silent and strenuous rivalry in which every section of the race is of necessity continually engaged, permanent success appears to be invariably associated with the ethical and moral conditions favourable to the maintenance of a high standard of social efficiency, and with those conditions only.

No one who engages in a serious study of the period of transition through which our Western civilisation is passing at the present time can resist the conclusion that we are rapidly approaching a time when we shall be face to face with social and political problems, graver in character and more far-reaching in extent than any which have been hitherto encountered. These problems are not peculiar to any nationality included in our civilisation. But in the

method of their solution, the social efficiency of the various sections of the Western peoples will probably be put to a severer test than any which it has yet had to undergo. Those who realise, however dimly, the immense part which the English-speaking peoples — if true to their own traditions — are not improbably destined to play in the immediate future of the world, will feel how great a gain any advance may be which enables us through the methods of modern science to obtain a clear perception of the stern, immutable conditions of moral fitness and uprightness through which alone a people can long continue to play a great part on the stage of the world. No other race has ever looked out upon such an opportunity as presents itself before these peoples in the twentieth century. Will they prove equal to it? The world will be poorer indeed and the outlook for our civilisation gloomy if they fail. Those of us who believe that they will not fail, feel that anything which helps the world to a better understanding of the great permanent causes which make for the improvement or decay of peoples, must needs act as a strengthening and bracing influence in the work which is before us.

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SOCIAL EVOLUTION.

BY

BENJAMIN KIDD.

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SOCIAL EVOLUTION

CHAPTER I

THE OUTLOOK

To the thoughtful mind the outlook at the close of the nineteenth century is profoundly interesting. History can furnish no parallel to it. The problems which loom across the threshold of the new century surpass in magnitude any that civilisation has hitherto had to encounter. We seem to have reached a time in which there is abroad in men's minds an instinctive feeling that a definite stage in the evolution of Western civilisation is drawing to a close, and that we are entering on a new era. Yet one of the most curious features of the time is the almost complete absence of any clear indication from those who speak in the name of science and authority as to the direction in which the path of future progress lies. On every side in those departments of knowledge which deal with social affairs change, transition, and uncertainty are apparent. Despite the great advances which science has made during the past century in almost every other direction, there is, it must be confessed, no science of human society properly so called. What knowledge there is exists in a more or less chaotic state scattered under many

heads ; and it is not improbably true, however much we may hesitate to acknowledge it, that the generalisations which have recently tended most to foster a conception of the unity underlying the laws operating amid the complex social phenomena of our time, have not been those which have come from the orthodox scientific school. They have rather been those advanced by that school of social revolutionists of which Karl Marx is the most commanding figure. Judged by the utterances of her spokesmen, science, whose great triumph in the nineteenth century has been the tracing of the steps in the evolution of life up to human society, stands now dumb before the problems presented by society as it exists around us. As regards its further evolution she appears to have no clear message.

In England we have a most remarkable example of the attitude of science when she is appealed to for aid and enlightenment in those all-engrossing problems with which society is struggling. One of the monumental works of our time is the "Synthetic Philosophy" of Mr. Herbert Spencer begun early in the second half of the century, and not yet completed. It is a stupendous attempt not only at the unification of knowledge, but at the explanation in terms of evolutionary science of the development which human society is undergoing, and towards the elucidation of which development it is rightly recognised that all the work of science in lower fields should be preliminary. Yet so little practical light has the author apparently succeeded in throwing on the nature of the social problems of our time, that his investigations and conclusions are, according as

they are dealt with by one side or the other, held to lead up to the opinions of the two diametrically opposite camps of individualists and collectivists into which society is slowly becoming organised.

From Mr. Herbert Spencer in England, who himself regards the socialistic tendencies of the times with dislike if not with alarm, and whose views are thus shared by some and opposed by others of his own followers, to Professor Schäffle in Germany, who regards the future as belonging to purified socialism, we have every possible and perplexing variety of opinion. The negative and helpless position of science is fairly exemplified in England by Professor Huxley, who in some of his recent writings has devoted himself to reducing the aims of the two conflicting parties of the day — individualists and socialists — to absurdity and impossibility respectively. These efforts are not, however, to be regarded as preliminary to an attempt to inspire us with any clear idea as to where our duty lies in the circumstances. After this onslaught his own faith in the future grows obscure, and he sends his readers on their way with, for guiding principle, no particular faith or hope in anything.¹

Yet that the times are pregnant of great changes the least observant must be convinced. Even those who indulge in these destructive criticisms seem to be conscious of this. Professor Huxley himself, despite his negative conclusions, is almost as outspoken as a Nihilist in his dissatisfaction with the existing

¹ See his "Government: Anarchy or Regimentation," *Nineteenth Century*, May 1890. See also his *Social Diseases and Worse Remedies*, pp. 13-51.

state of things. "Even the best of modern civilisations," said he recently, "appears to me to exhibit a condition of mankind which neither embodies any worthy ideal nor even possesses the merit of stability. I do not hesitate to express the opinion that if there is no hope of a large improvement of the condition of the greater part of the human family; if it is true that the increase of knowledge, the winning of a greater domain over nature which is its consequence, and the wealth which follows upon that domain are to make no difference in the extent and the intensity of want with its concomitant physical and moral degradation amongst the masses of the people, I should hail the advent of some kindly comet which would sweep the whole affair away as a desirable consummation."¹ It is the large body of thought which this kind of feeling inspires which is now stirring European society to its depths, and nothing is more certain than that it will have to be reckoned with. M. de Laveleye, a few years ago, put the feeling into words. The message of the eighteenth century to man was, he said, "Thou shalt cease to be the slave of nobles and despots who oppress thee; thou art free and sovereign." But the problem of our times is: "It is a grand thing to be free and sovereign, but how is it that the sovereign often starves? how is it that those who are held to be the source of power often cannot, even by hard work, provide themselves with the necessaries of life?"² Mr. Henry George

¹ "Government: Anarchy or Regimentation," by Professor Huxley, *Nineteenth Century*, May 1890.

² "Communism:" by Emile de Laveleye, *Contemporary Review*, March 1890.