THE HISTORY OF UTOPIAN THOUGHT

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"Ah Love! could you and I with Fate conspire
To grasp the sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would we not shatter it to bits—and then
Remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire?"

Ninety-ninth quatrain of
Fitzgerald's "Omar Khayyam"

PREFACE

This book embodies two related and yet distinct types of sociological endeavor. It is a study in the history of social thought, a field which has only been receiving serious and widespread attention in recent years, and attempts to give an historical cross-section of representative Utopian thought. But it is also a study in social idealism, a study in the origin, selection and potency of those social ideas and ideals that occasional and usually exceptional men conceive, with particular emphasis upon their relation to social progress.

The merit that I can hope for this book lies in the fact that, to my knowledge, it is the first book that attempts to give an unprejudiced, systematic treatment of the social Utopias as a whole. Its errors and weaknesses are those which all trail blazers have; for that reason suggestion and criticism are invited.

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to friends and colleagues for assistance of various kinds, to my wife for her painstaking aid in the verification of footnotes and the preparation of the manuscript, but above all to my teacher and colleague, Prof. E. A. Ross, for his constant encouragement, suggestion, and kindly criticism through the years this book has been in preparation.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

At this moment in the history of the civilized world when social chaos and discontent are everywhere prevalent, men are analyzing social phenomena, groping about for causes, and seeking solutions for these very puzzling complications. This, however, is not the first time that the race has faced this problem; from the dawn of history at times men have known the same unrest, for it is in the nature of customs and institutions, regardless of the department of life with which they are connected, to become antiquated and corrupt; so its men of intelligence and social spirit, its prophets of all time, have devoted their talents to devising instruments of change for the better.

In the literature of social thought a numerous, but much neglected and ridiculed section consists of the so-called social utopias, which confine themselves wholly to the problem outlined briefly above. The word "Utopia" itself has its origin in the name of the ideal social state conceived and dramatically described by the Englishman, Sir Thomas More, in a book in dialogue form written in Latin in the years 1515–1516, published by Froben at Louvain, later translated and circulated throughout Europe. It is the distinctive characteristic of this work which has caused its name to become the general term for imaginary ideal societies. And that distinctive feature is this: More depicted a perfect, and perhaps unrealizable, society, located in some nowhere, purged of the shortcomings, the wastes,

and the confusion of our own time and living in perfect adjustment, full of happiness and contentment.

The Utopias seemingly have never been taken very seriously,[1] nor have scholars paid them much attention. The history of literature casts them outside as curiosities or as belonging in the field of politics or statescraft; political science has given little heed to them because they are held to be fantastic and unscientific. Religion and theology have dealt with a few, but the bulk of them have fallen without the religious field, strictly speaking. It has remained for sociology, with its limitless human interest, to examine them and appraise them in the light of later social idealism.

Among these Utopias we find in most cases searching analyses of current social situations, lucid and fascinating anticipations of a better or perfect society to come, and a presentation of instruments and principles of social progress which men of succeeding epochs have sometimes adopted and used in promoting improvement. While there is in them much that is naïve and useless from the point of view of the present, they breathe a spirit and offer suggestions which the socially minded evolutionist and the philosophical historian of to-day cannot overlook.

It is the object of the first part of this work to analyze some of the more representative and better known social Utopias, examining their social background and portraying briefly their singular features, but devoting the major portion of the exposition to a careful study of the agencies and principles whereby this social perfection was to be attained. Behind the Utopias lies the utopian spirit, that is, the feeling that society is capable of improvement and can be made over to realize a rational ideal. We propose to trace it historically from its first prominent expression. Since we find the first and most significant ideas of this kind in these Utopias, we have called this spirit "utopianism," meaning thereby *a conception of social improvement*

1 "Utopias are generally regarded as literary curiosities which have been made respectable by illustrious names, rather than as serious contributions to the political problems which troubled the age at which they appeared." Smith, "Harrington and his 'Oceana,'" p. 12.

either by ideas and ideals themselves or embodied in definite agencies of social change. From the earliest Hebrew prophets on we have more or less conscious ideals of this kind expressed, and the means whereby such rebuilding is to take place indicated with varying degrees of definiteness. We will treat of the theorizings of people as widely diverse in their training, views, and purposes as are the means proposed to bring in their ideal states.

In the second part of this work we will appraise and analyze the Utopias, their writers, and their utopianism and the rôle of ideas and ideals contained therein. This program also demands an investigation as to any contributions they have made in human advance, and any visible influence of their potency. Of course, it also necessitates an analysis of their shortcomings. Finally, it involves a treatment of the effect of the evolutionary conception and the theory of history which came with it, on the utopian idea and the consequent changes in the type of Utopias.

Throughout it is essentially a study of social ideas and ideals, —the influence of environment and events in producing them, the types of individuals conceiving them, the factors responsible for their survival, and their ability to translate themselves into fact.

PART ONE

SOCIAL UTOPIAS: AN HISTORICAL REVIEW

CHAPTER II

THE ETHICO-RELIGIOUS UTOPIANS AND THEIR UTOPIANISM

1. The Prophets as Forerunners of the Utopians

a. Introduction

There is a common impression that Plato was the first to picture a perfect future of whom we have record in literature, and that his "Republic" was the first Utopia or ideal commonwealth. This is the result of holding to a literary field too narrowly conceived. A broader reading with the search for utopian elements uppermost, will bring a different conclusion.

Among another people and in another literature which antedated that of Greece by several centuries we find numerous utopian expressions by men, who, as social critics and social architects, were the equals if not the peers of Plato. We refer to the Hebrew prophets,[1]—men of marked individuality and originality; men of rare ability in appraising their times, in suggesting lines of social reconstruction, and in depicting the perfect future. We will devote the ensuing section to their study.

Because of the practically limitless field which thus opened to us we shall concentrate our study upon the so-called "literary" prophets who form that wonderful movement which was inaugurated by Amos, the shepherd of Tekoa, about the middle of the eighth century B. C., and continued after him by an unbroken line of prophets through upward of three centuries,

[1] The prophetic period proper can be said to have begun with Samuel in the eleventh century B. C., and to have extended to the fourth century B. C., when it insensibly passed over into the period of the Apocalyptists.

before, during, and after the Babylonian exile of the Hebrews. We shall devote ourselves to them for the following reasons: first, they are in their broad general aspects characteristic prophets; second, owing to the fact that they are "literary," i. e., have left their ideas in writing, their Utopias are authentic to a greater extent than the prophetic Utopias which have been passed from generation to generation by word of mouth before being written and thus had lost many of their pristine characteristics; and third, they show most clearly the development of the utopian idea, spoken of by them as the "Messianic" state, and profess doctrines making for what we have called utopianism.

But we must even limit our field here. So we have decided to consider the works attributed to the six most important prophets of this group, namely, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Deutero-Isaiah, who have been called the beacon lights of prophecy.[2]

Since this is primarily a sociological study we shall hold ourselves aloof from all theological and exegetical controversy and certain mooted points of higher criticism. We will, however, accept those interpretations of time and authorship of passages upon which we find almost universal unity of opinion among Biblical scholars. What we are concerned with above all else, are the contemporary social conditions which impelled the prophets to speak as they did; the fact that there were men in those early times who felt the need of reconstructing society; men who conceived of means to be employed in bringing about the ideal state free from the evils of the time, and who possessed the constructive imagination to foresee what this ideal commonwealth might be and to describe what they saw. Whether it was this familiar individual or that unknown one does not matter so much.

We will conclude our treatment of the six prophets mentioned with a brief summary of the sociological significance of the prophets, hoping thereby to establish them definitely as forerunners of the Utopians.

[2] See the book of that name by A. C. Knudson, New York, 1914.

b. Amos

The first of these prophets was Amos, a rugged, virile character who evokes our profound admiration. "Amos is one of the most marvelous and incomprehensible figures in the history of the human mind, the pioneer of a process of evolution from which a new epoch of humanity dates." [3] It was he who gave impetus to that spirit of hope which we expect to trace through the following pages,—a movement centering about a perfect future state and containing the purest elements of utopianism.

Amos lived and spoke about the middle of the eighth century B. C., in the days of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, whose long brilliant reign had been marked by peace and prosperity.[4] It was after one of Israel's periods of depression and distress when she had again raised herself to power. Her worst enemy, the kingdom of Damascus, had been decisively defeated, and was no longer dangerous; the neighboring nations had been subjected and Jeroboam II reigned over a kingdom extending from Hamath to the Dead Sea, the size and grandeur of which had not been surpassed since the days of David. Israel was the ruling nation between the Nile and the Euphrates. The internal doings were seemingly as brilliant and stupendous as they had ever been. Everything breathed of luxury and riches; ivory palaces, houses of hewn stone, castles and forts, horses and chariots, power and pomp, the luxurious and idle rich; all proclaimed the prosperity of the times.[5] In the year 760 B. C., the Autumn festival was being celebrated at Bethel, and in accordance with the spirit of the time, revelry was the order of the day. Unwonted splendor characterized the feast, and untold sacrifices were offered. People felt that all was well.

But suddenly the festival mirth was interrupted and the merry revelers were shaken out of their complacency, for Amos, a herdsman and sycamore dresser of Tekoa, a plain-looking

[3] Cornill, C. H. "The Prophets of Israel," Chicago, 1899, p. 46.
[4] Smith, H. P. "Old Testament History," New York, 1915, pp. 177–184.
[5] Amos 6:4–6

and lowly, but tremendously inspired man appeared among them, denouncing them and predicting their early destruction.

We ask ourselves, was Amos fit to speak as he did? We answer, yes! He was a man stern by nature. Furthermore, he was accustomed to the stern scenery of the wild country among the Judean hills around the Dead Sea. And so the loneliness of his life as a shepherd and the ruggedness of his surroundings deepened much the native sternness of his soul. He had time to brood and ponder, to appraise events, and contemplate consequences. At the same time he traveled much, because of his occupation, saw much, and came in contact with many people. It was with this clarity of vision and keenness of insight that he had drawn his conclusions and arrived at his solution. Beneath the shining surface of things his keen eyes saw the symptoms of rottenness and inevitable decay. The people were inflated and proud; the whole splendid structure of which the nation boasted was to Amos a tottering edifice, doomed to destruction. The times were those of false worship and social injustice; ritualism had supplanted spirituality and oppression had smothered justice.

The worship of God in ancient Israel had always been of a thoroughly joyful and cheerful character; it was considered to be a rejoicing in God. But by Amos's time it had degenerated to a Saturnalian orgy. Revelry and tumultuous carousings marked the festivals: drunkenness and indecency together with the most licentious debaucheries were common at the local shrines. And yet the contemporaries of Amos considered this the correct and fitting worship of God.[6] The spirit of the age had befogged their vision. But the prophets, especially Amos, recognized in those aberrations remnants of acquired paganism, chiefly that of the Canaanites. For him the sacrifices were not only something indifferent, they were even contemptible,—a multiplication of transgressions.[7] The sanctuaries were places of whoredom. It is for this reason that Amos cried out in protest against the ceremonies of the feast

[6] Cornill, C. H. op cit., p. 38.
[7] Amos 4:4