

THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL WELFARE.

WEALTH AND WELFARE. By Professor A. C. Pigou. Macmillan. 10/- net.

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT AND MORAL PROGRESS. By Dr. A. R. Wallace. Cassell and Co. 3/6 net.

THE TASK OF SOCIAL HYGIENE. By Havelock Ellis. Constable. 8/6 net.

THESE three volumes, fortuitously grouped together by the Editor, suggest an interesting comparison. They all deal with the problem of social welfare; but two of the writers approach the problem entirely from the standpoint of the social biologist, while the third attacks it as a pure economist. And this difference of outlook is reflected in a very marked difference of tone. The two representatives of the newer social specialism write with the direct vigour and hopefulness of a rising faith; the representative of the older science writes, not indeed diffidently or despairingly, but with a laboured complexity of argument which suggests an exhausted and rather discredited theme. I do not, however, wish to imply that, as a contribution to our understanding of welfare, the message of the economist is a worn-out gospel: but it certainly does not shine by the side of the freshness, the confidence, and the attractive simplicity of the social

biologist's teachings. The fact is that Professor Pigou has tried to prove what the early economists, at a time when *their* specialism was new, assumed with the same easy certainty which the eugenist now displays. Eighty years ago Nassau Senior could still write airily—"It is not with happiness but with wealth that I am concerned as a political economist; and I am perhaps bound to omit all considerations which have no influence on wealth. In fact, however, wealth and happiness are very seldom opposed,—thanks to beneficent nature." With *that* position time has dealt very harshly; and Mr. Pigou has undertaken to make out a saner and more reasonable conclusion by careful argument and appeal to experience. He deserves all honour for the attempt. The task is really well carried out; his arguments are most interesting to other economists, and in some cases new and full of suggestion; and his whole attitude is sane and balanced. But the work is marked by two defects. On the one hand, it is unnecessarily elaborate: the analysis of the meaning of welfare is more careful than profound, and is cumbered by many references and quotations which show erudition rather than a clear grasp of the issue; and there is a really needless display of the most difficult scientific terminology. The comment of a leading banker was, in reference to this defect, quite pertinent: "I suppose," he said, "it is all sound. But was there any need to make it all so difficult?" The other defect is even less excusable. Professor Pigou has seriously damaged the economist's cause by a strange over-statement of his importance, and an assumption of authority which is even insulting to other thinkers. A single quotation from his conclusion might serve almost as a complete condemnation of his whole attitude. "It is a popular delusion that, while economic science itself is a difficult subject, the discussion of practical problems, in which economic forces play an important part, can safely be undertaken without special preparation. There is no warrant for this view. The study of economic theory is, indeed, difficult; but the application of the knowledge, which that study wins, to the guidance of practical affairs, is an even heavier task; for it needs, not only a full understanding of the theory, but also a trained judgment that can balance against one another a large number of qualifying considerations." The implication of this rather pompous pronouncement is startling. If Mr. Pigou's conviction had effect, every Parliament House in the world would be emptied, and the "discussion of practical problems," in all of which we may admit that "economic forces play an important part," would be respectfully left in the hands of some half-dozen professors of economic science,—until such time as the dogmatists of another social specialism managed to supplant them. Truly a delightful way of escape from what Mr. Branford has called "the devious, brambly, futile mudpath of politics!"

Now it is clearly not in this matter of a calm assumption of authority that we shall find the contrast between the three books under review. Dr. Wallace and Mr. Havelock Ellis are not exactly humble writers: these older representatives of a young faith would put their heels upon our necks just as mercilessly as the young representative of the older faith. But with this difference: Mr. Pigou does at any rate try to persuade us to submit; the social biologist and the eugenist simply assume that we will do so, and then proceed to issue their commands. There is, however, no ground for immediate uneasiness. We may keep our independence a little longer. We escape from the heel of Mr. Pigou because of the shockingly bad record of his predecessors,—a weakness of which he is perfectly conscious. And we escape the heel of the neo-biologists, simply because they cannot agree

where to put it down. This is the part of the charm of their writings : their doctrines cancel one another. Each of the two books seems convincing, by reason of the intense conviction of its author, until the other is read. Mr. Ellis persuades us that there is no road to social welfare except by conscious and purposive race-culture. Dr. Wallace will have none of this : our only hope is to confine the application of conscious purpose to the straightening out of our deplorable social conditions, and then let natural selection do its work unaided. Here is a gulf indeed, deeper and wider than that which separates individualists from socialists. For the biological sociologists carry us far beyond these older antagonisms. It is true that Dr. Wallace is a socialist, of a sort. Like the 18th century precursors of Socialism, he has found that man's bungling (called modern civilisation) is the sole enemy to nature's saving grace. Therefore, like all socialists, he would clear the ground of the monstrous lumber of legal and other inequities by which society is cursed. But that is only a negative process ; and after that, it is not in new laws or man-made contrivances that his hope is fixed, but in the cleansing and preserving power of beneficent nature. Mr. Ellis, on the other hand, is rather individualist than socialist, though not in the ordinary sense of the term. His faith and hope begin only when these commonplace policies are brushed aside. "So it is that the question of breed, the production of fine individuals, . . . begins to be seen, not merely as a noble ideal in itself, but as the only method by which Socialism can be enabled to continue on the present path." The quickening of individual responsibility, in the sense of eugenic responsibility, is the sole hope for society : social hygiene, not socialistic sanitation, is the key to social happiness.

Well, we are free to choose which guide we will follow. We may be socialists still, with Dr. Wallace, merely tacking on a biological faith to our practical belief in conscious social re-organisation. Or we may cling to our individualism, and, like Mr. Ellis, fix our hope on the growth of individual responsibility, inspired by the eugenic ideal. But does not all this point to an eclipse of the economic luminaries? Will Mr. Pigou's elaborate arguments and lofty assumption of supreme importance hold our attention at all?

One remark must be added, in fairness to Professor Pigou. His book is really a book, carefully written and very well put together. The other two are not books at all. Dr. Wallace has written a lengthy pamphlet, no more. Mr. Ellis has given us a collection of interesting essays, loosely strung together.

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