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SOCIAL FORCES

BY D. H. MERCER.

WE live in an age of action. Rich in the accumulated strength of centuries our social forces are applying their agencies effectually and with a will. Kingdoms are decaying, empires tottering; and in the very midst of a silent revolution republics are growing. The stream of destiny dashes on and on, removing from its channel every obstruction, every barrier, and hurrying along with it progressive humanity. Science, philosophy and art; discoveries, inventions and conquests; education, religion, legislation and philanthropy; crusades, rebellions, revolutions and wonderful reformations,—all these and a thousand other social forces bear the headlights of social progress, throwing their guiding rays along the pathway of the future, pointing out to humanity the inevitable destiny marked out for her by the hand of inexorable fate. To-day these forces are at their utmost tension, and we rush along with a speed characteristic of our age. This rapid progress is not due to Nature; she has shown us no partiality. These are the causes. The past worshipped the winds and the waves; we make them our servants. The past theorized and dreamed; we execute and reap the benefits. The past wandered in a metaphysical atmosphere; we labor in a practical world. In consequence of this difference there is imputed to us a too practical age by contemporaries who cling to the cherished old with the desperation of drowning men and cry down the new as an unwarranted innovation. Let us bear with the imputation and glory in the charge, and when the time comes for us to leave this stage of action, instead of handing down to posterity a few blank pyramids, a ruined colosseum and some broken columns, our legacy shall be the telegraph, the steamship, the railroad. Instead of bequeathing to future generations simply the remembrances of a powerful government, we shall entrust to their care that grand and massive palace of architecture, founded upon civil liberty, popular education and human rights—American Republicanism.

Let us particularize a few social forces. An education pure thorough and comprehensive; an education purged of superfluities and pregnant with culture and refinement; an education for woman as well as for man—an education for the masses and not for caste, such an education is a social force, and it behooves America to foster and support it. The chief work of this government is the education of its subjects, and the safety and permanence of our public institutions demand that a

popular knowledge, rich in culture, replete with the deepest thought, shall permeate and permeate the whole social system, elevating all humanity to that higher plane now occupied by the privileged few. To reach this unprecedented standard, our public school system must be developed and improved. This crucible of the human brain should not have the hardness of adamant, but rather the flexibility and elasticity of the air, allowing the immortal mind in all its power and grandeur unlimited scope in infinite fields. The state should be its guardian, the nation its protector; and if any political party, or religious organization shall raise its hand to strike a fatal blow, let the vaulted heavens reverberate with the cries of just indignation, while public opinion consigns the assailants to an unworthy tomb.

The school soon develops into a college, a university. These to be social forces must conform to the requirements of the times in which they have their being. This age demands less theory and more practice—less Greek and Roman, more science and modern language. If we would educate our youth for the responsibilities attached to American citizenship, if we would inculcate in their minds the sacredness of the ballot, when and how to use it, we must reform the college curriculum. By this we do not mean a total extrusion of the classics; far from it, for we recognize in them mines of true worth. But we do object to their wearing the badge of privilege. The days of idols disappeared with mythology, and we shall no longer pay homage to them. If we had the lives of our biblical forefathers, a decade or more devoted to a study of the ancient world might not be amiss, but three-score years and ten is too short a lease on life for such a sacrifice of time. The tongues of Homer and Virgil are no better than that of Milton and Shakespeare. Then let us do as did the classic Greeks, make our indigenous language of the first importance in our public schools and colleges. Let us fathom its depths, exhume its riches, analyze its complications and realize its full value. Then possibly America may erect such a monument of national literature, grander, nobler, more imposing than that which graced Grecian or Roman soil.

This education should be made compulsory. Both the expense incurred and the welfare of the republic warrant the demand. Such a culmination will lift universal man from the hovels of bias and illiteracy into the higher and holier realms of social culture and progress. The bar will then inculcate the learning and wisdom of Justice; the press will partake of the dignity and cultivation of the scholar, and the pulpit will boast the reverence and holiness of the Creator; religion and science will be made to join hands in one common cause; sectional strife will go the way of slavery; capital and labor will lay aside animosity and recognize the fact that each is necessary to the other. Out of this compulsory education will come forth another social force, an improved political system, and then will human legislation cease its monotonous "act to amend an act;" then the American Congress will be the congregated wisdom instead of the assembled foolishness of the

nation. Then a knowledge of political economy and science of government, instead of skill in trickery and intrigue, will be the criterion of a man's fitness to wear the robes of statesmanship. In spite of volumes written in letters of bitter experience, in spite of the warnings of Peck and Gladstone, American Congressmen are spreading their mantles of influence over that "bane of agriculture," protection, and robbing free trade of its merited recognition. They are continually throwing into discord the social world by their blunders and inconsistencies. They have a mania for legislation. They would legislate from human nature all her desires and passions, and fill the vacuum with a theorized prohibition. They would supersede the regency of supply and demand, and do what man was never expected to do—regulate the law of wages. They would make two divisions of this republic diametrically opposed to each other in many particulars, think and act as one, at the same time stirring up with that officious agent—race prejudice, the caldron of sectional animosities. The day is not far distant, unless this appetite for political prestige be appeased, when these prominent guides of our republic's destiny, saturated with the conceit of egotism, will presume to legislate the souls of men into other worlds.

The grandest social force of all has not yet been mentioned. Her past has been mysterious, miraculous, wonderful, her present is amazing, her future is unfathomable. As she led the world from darkness to light, her bitter eyes tore off her garments of light, stifled her animated voice and bound down an assisting arm. Although she lay for so many centuries at the feet of priestcraft and superstition, her trembling spirit remained undaunted to the last. Recovering herself from this subservience, she glided on and on until to-day her sceptre touches every zone, her converts enlighten every clime. Now and then in her journey down the ages, through the rash inconsiderateness of an enthusiast, her reputation has been sullied, her fame tinged with shame by violating those very principles which she all along has been contending for; but as the filmy scales fall from her eyes and human reason broadens and liberalizes, her supreme intelligence will welcome to the classroom Herbert Spencer as well as Noah Porter. But this liberal tendency should not mean sensationalism. Some of our leading divines claim high salaries and lofty praise. They are ambitious for universal admiration, seeking applause and imitation in every sermon, but by thus pandering to the passions of men they are undermining the foundations of government by tearing down the walls of morality, and letting in all the disorders of the time. Without the pale of the church this sensationalism is taking a similar course. Men seek prominence and *ecclat* by attacking christianity and blaspheming its Creator. Have we so soon forgotten the telling warnings of France? Shall man commit suicide on the eve of reaching his Pisgah of renown? Oh, something is so much better than nothing! and we have no desire to be stranded on the desolate shores of nowhere, hopeless, shrouded in despair. If we could escape the errors of preceding ages, the youthful mind must be tutored and disciplined in the precepts of truth, and the poisonous breath of sensationalism and infidelity, whether emanating from the social circle, the literary sanctum or the professor's chair, should never be allowed a lodgment there.