

of silly-cleverness into the abyss of folly. One has a startled sense of the artist conceived as a pet lapdog for the dilettanti having his growth stunted by a diet of gin in order that he may be a more amusing monster than Nature made him.

I should not quarrel with this folly if it were recognized as such; for a good deal of new country is discovered by simply going astray. The straight and narrow path has been so often explored that we all go a little way down the paths of danger and destruction merely to see what they are like; and even the paths of tomfoolery may lead to a view or two. Dixon Scott had qualifications for such rambling which made him a very agreeable critic, and sometimes a very useful one. Chief among these was his knowledge of the natural history of the artist, which preserved him from many current journalistic sillinesses. To take a personal example, the fact that I am an Irish Protestant, and that I published a volume called *Three Plays for Puritans*, has created a legend about the gloomy, sour, Sabbath-ridden, Ulster-Covenanting home in which I was brought up, and in which my remarkable resemblance to St. Paul, St. Anthony, and John Knox was stamped on me. To Dixon Scott this was as patently absurd as an assumption that the polar bear owes his black fur to his Negro parents. He at once picked out the truth and packed it into the statement that I am the son of Donizetti's Lucrezia Borgia. (As a matter of fact I was brought up in an atmosphere in which two of the main constituents were Italian opera and complete freedom of thought; and my attitude to conventional British life ever since has been that of a missionary striving to understand the superstitions of the natives in order to make himself intelligible to them.) All through this book, in dealing with me, with Wells, with Kipling, with Houghton, he is saved again and again by his knowledge of the sort of animal the artist is in his nonage. Unfortunately his knowledge stops there. He does not understand the artist's manhood; protests with all his soul against the inevitable development; and always, however ridiculously, sets up the same theory that the shy romantic dreamer has put on a mask, which, as he wittily says, gets so hard pressed upon his face by popular applause that it moulds his very features to its shape. Shaw, Kipling, Wells & Co. are timid children desperately playing at being strong but by no means silent men; and he tries to strip our masks off, and show our real faces, which, however, are all the same face, and a very obvious doll's face at that. His mistake is in taking the method of nature, which is a dramatic method, for a theatrical pose. No doubt every man has a shy child in him, artist or no artist. But every man whose business it is to work upon other men, whether as artist, politician, advocate, propagandist, organizer, teacher or what not, must dramatize himself and play his part. To the laborer who merely digs and vegetates, to the squire who merely hunts and eats, to the mathematician and physicist, these men of the platform and the tribune may seem affected and theatrical; but when they themselves desire to impress their needs or views on their fellows they find that they, too, must find a pose or else remain paralyzed and dumb. In short, what is called a pose is simply a technical condition of certain activities. It is offensive only when out of place: the artist who brings his pose to the dinner table is like the general who puts his sword, or the dentist who puts his forceps, beside his plate just to show that he has one. He cannot, however, always leave it behind him. Queen Victoria complained that Gladstone talked to her as if she were a public meeting; but surely that is the way in which a prime minister should address a

queen when affairs of state are on the carpet. Lord Melbourne's pose may have been more genial and human; but so it would when he addressed a public meeting doubtless. Dixon Scott takes this very simple natural phenomenon, and, guessing at once that he can be very clever about it if he begins by being very stupid, pays that price for being clever. It is monstrously stupid to try to foist Morris, Wells, and Kipling (to say nothing of myself) on the reader as creatures with guilty secrets, all their secrets being the same secret: to wit, that they are not Morris, Wells, and Kipling at all, but sensitive plants of quite another species. Still, on that stupid assumption he writes very cleverly, sometimes with penetrating subtlety. But as he remains the Fancier, he is never sound, and is only quite satisfactory when dealing with pure virtuosity, which he finds only in Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika*. And then he has to leave you in ignorance of the fact that Max is the most savage Radical caricaturist since Gillray, and that *Zuleika* is only his play, not his work.

It was a kind and devoted act of Mr. St. John Adcock to collect and edit these reviews, and very modest of him to allow Max to take the stage as their introducer. They are the best monument their untimely slain author could have desired. I have no space here to do more than point out the limitations of Dixon Scott's view of art, and how the young literary voluptuary flourished at the expense of the critic of life. But I can guarantee the book as being not only frightfully smart in the wrong places, but, in the best of the right ones, as good as it is in the nature of the best journalistic criticism to be. G. B. S.

## The Ethics of Economic Reform

*Distributive Justice*, by John A. Ryan, D.D. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$1.50.

NOW when the rage for departmentalizing human knowledge is spent, the candid economist must recall with some sense of shame his early attempts to exclude ethical elements from his scientific domain. "It is our business to determine what is and what will be; what ought to be concerns other specialists." How stupid this sounds to-day! As a matter of fact economics never succeeded in winning its freedom from ethics. Only little men ever were able to discuss child labor, the sweating system, monopolistic extortion, without generating at least a modicum of moral heat. Indeed, it would hardly be too much to say that the chief impetus to economic study, ever since the days of Adam Smith, has been the urgency of economic and social reforms that have no meaning apart from ethics.

Ethical judgments abound in economic literature, but these are derivative from common sense, not from any logical system of ethics. This is the fault of the ethical systematizers as well as of the economists. Few ethical authorities have had sufficient knowledge of economic facts to adapt ethical principles to the economic field; few economists are abreast of the best modern work in ethics. To this rule the most notable exception among contemporary writers is Dr. Ryan. His economic scholarship is unimpeachable; survey his writings, and you are forced to the conclusion that among the economists of to-day there are not many who can match him in command of the literature and in sanity of judgment. He would not make a



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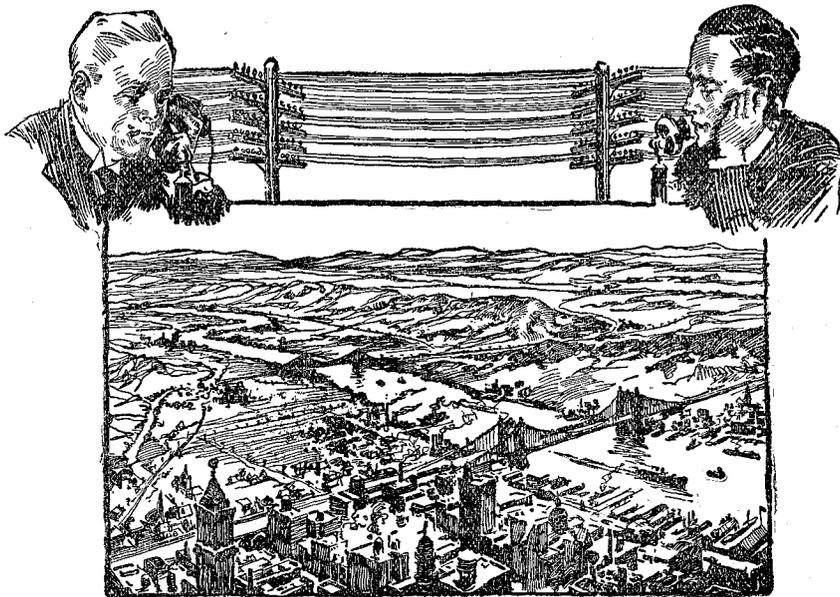
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good mathematical economist, one infers from his handling of certain aspects of the interest problem and of "economic causation"; but a man may be an excellent economist without mathematical gifts. Dr. Ryan's ethical scholarship is also sound. It is essentially a Catholic ethics that he professes, and therefore conservative. This makes it all the more significant that Dr. Ryan's book should be worthy of adoption as a manual of radical economic reform.

The one postulate Dr. Ryan requires the reader to accept is the inherent worth of human personality, the equal right of one personality with every other to existence and to what gives existence human value. From this postulate Dr. Ryan, by practically flawless logical processes, derives all his conclusions as to the rights and wrongs of the present distribution of income. Rights to wages, to profits, to interest, to rent are subjected rigorously to the test of human welfare. A priority of right, naturally, is accorded to wages. "Every man who is willing to work has an inborn right to sustenance from the earth on reasonable terms or conditions." That is, spending such effort, exercising such intelligence, as may reasonably be expected, every man has a right to such wages as will provide for himself and his family the necessities and most general comforts of life. In the concrete, this means the living wage, as defined by the best qualified social investigators. On what ground is the right based? "On the same ground that validates his right to life, marriage, or any of the other fundamental goods of human existence. On the dignity of personality."

This, every one will agree, is what ought to be. But, we say, we are living in a practical, not an ethical world—Dr. Ryan has no sympathy with such an attitude of helplessness. The laborer has a natural right to a living wage: "One of the elementary functions and obligations of the state is to protect citizens in the enjoyment of their natural rights"; let the state forthwith proceed, by minimum wage legislation, to raise the wage earner to a living condition. Dr. Ryan admits the moral value of attempts on the part of the laborers to raise themselves to this level through unionism. Only a minority have succeeded in this or can succeed; the great majority have state action as their only recourse. And such action is not an optional function of the state. It is a primary and necessary function. What if the social income is not great enough to make this feasible? Dr. Ryan concludes, after a full survey of the available facts, that the social income is quite sufficient for the purpose. If not, the sooner we put the question to the test and demonstrate the bankruptcy of our economic system, the better it will be for us in the long run.

Rights to profits, interest and rent stand on an inferior footing. When they conflict with the right to a living wage, they have no validity. This principle Dr. Ryan applies not only institutionally, but to the action of individuals. The business man has no right to interest on his capital unless he pays a living wage. He is not a merchant, buying labor as a commodity. He is a social functionary, a leader in the common enterprise of creating goods, and a distributor of the price received for them. His primary obligation is to make a just distribution, and what justice would he display if he voted himself interest on capital while withholding an essential part of their living from his co-workers? He may justly assert a prior claim to a fair living for himself, and no more. To be sure, a business man may weary of a profitless enterprise and withdraw his capital to a more remunerative field. This would be within his moral right; Dr. Ryan thinks that even so his action would be conducive to the worker's wel-

# 1917-AMERICAN RIGHTS-1798

Miss Agnes Repplier and Dr. Lyman Abbott have declared war on Germany. They are not alone in taking this historic step. They speak for the "American Rights League," which counts among its members Talcott Williams, the Rev. Randolph H. McKim, Prof. William Gardner Hale, and other "clear-headed, far-sighted, patriotic Americans." Their manifesto of February 12 declares that "The acts of war have been consummated. . . . It is no longer a question as to whether there shall be war with Germany. There is war with Germany."

As we look back at American history, we realize how unfortunate it is that the American Rights League was not organized earlier. It probably would have been able to clear the heads, lengthen the sight, and buck up the patriotism of George Washington, President Adams and the American Congress from 1793 to 1800, when the United States was hovering on the verge of war with France.

The American Rights League will remember that the great European war was then in progress. It was Washington who declared in 1793 that the United States should "pursue a conduct friendly and impartial to the belligerent powers." And although American sentiment was overwhelmingly in favor of France and against England, our country refused to go to war with a nation with whom we had no quarrel.

By 1796, the depredations of France, aimed at England, but falling heavily upon us, had become intolerable. Our ships were sunk, American merchandise was destroyed, American lives were lost. Marine insurance rose to prohibitive rates. In July, the French Directorate passed an act providing that Americans found on belligerent ships *should be treated as pirates*. In 1797, Mr. Pickering, our Secretary of State, protested against the spoliation and maltreatment of our vessels by French ships of war. He protested against an embargo on vessels at Bordeaux, against condemnation of ships and cargoes under French marine ordinances incompatible with treaties. Meanwhile, American citizens were captured on American ships by French men of war and forced to serve in the French navy. Finally the Directorate in 1798 decreed that its navy might seize all vessels loaded with goods coming from the enemy's ports, no matter of what nationality or to whom consigned.

*Still there was no war.*

Washington was succeeded by John Adams as President, but Washington's policy prevailed. Neutrality was observed under intense provocation, and in spite of an abundance of such sentiment as is now represented by the American Rights League.

Finally, for the protection of our interests, Congress declared a policy of Armed Neutrality against France. A larger navy was recruited; reprisals against French aggressions were authorized; our commerce was convoyed; we had naval engagements with French ships; we took prisoners, and they took prisoners. Other incidental hostilities occurred. But the policy of Washington was adhered to by Adams, by the Congress, and by the people of the United States. *We did not go to war with France, because we had no real quarrel with France; and because the people realized that the injuries done to us were not aimed at us, but were a part of the terrific struggle of Europe.* Patiently, courageously, Washington and Adams and the Congress held true patriotism above jingoism. We remained at peace, under huge financial loss, under loss of life, under the imputation of cowardice. And history has justified us.

It is a pity we had no American Rights League then.

If you want to spread this point of view widely over the country, send money at once to COMMITTEE FOR DEMOCRATIC CONTROL (formerly Emergency Office), Room 1034, 70 Fifth Avenue, New York City. It will be used for nothing else.

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fare. Perhaps: but the question is one of mathematical economics, to which Dr. Ryan's method is not well adapted.

Assuming that living wages are paid, the capitalist has a contingent right to the surplus. It is no better than that of the worker, who has a right to take more than a living wage, if he can get it. The landowner's right to rent is on the same footing as the capitalist's right to interest. Assuming that the men who work the soil, tenants or hired laborers, obtain fair livings, the landowner has a right to rent, if he can get it. The assertion of the Single Taxers that rent is under all circumstances an unjust income is examined at length, and rejected. But Dr. Ryan strongly urges the wisdom of increment taxes to check speculative gains, and progressive taxes to break up large holdings. Even discriminatory taxes on land, as compared with improvements, seem desirable to him. He would have the state hold all forest and mineral lands and the sources of hydro-electric power. Public service monopolies should also be owned by the state, and all other monopolies should be subjected to close regulation.

Inequalities of fortune obtaining to-day are regarded by Dr. Ryan as a serious evil. To place a limit upon accumulation he does not consider a violation of the natural right to private property; he merely questions its social expediency. Heavily graduated incomes and inheritance taxes appear to him not only just but socially expedient. The evils of an inequitable distribution of wealth might be obviated by the practice of private morality. One whose income exceeds the requirements of decent living is morally bound to distribute the surplus in philanthropy.

It is possible to quarrel with Dr. Ryan on matters of detail. In some respects his ethics seems not sufficiently socialized. Grant that the worker has a right to a living wage: does the correlative obligation of assuring it rest upon the employer, who may be unable to meet the obligation, or upon the state, which no doubt has the required ability? Dr. Ryan conceives of the obligation as resting upon the employer, but has an alternative conception of the state's obligation in the premises. The former conception is not necessary to the author's conclusions, and is the origin of whatever questionable economic reasoning the book contains. The blemish, however, is minor and it does not detract from the author's merit in presenting the most comprehensive and dignified existing treatise on the ethics of economic reform.

A. S. J.

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