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A Plea for Liberty. by Thomas Mackay

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An adequate survey of so large and important a work is here impossible. It must suffice to say that Mr. Mackenzie has approached his subject along that road of idealism by which alone it is accessible, and that he has given the clearest, brightest, and soundest exposition accessible to English students. Finally, there is no trace in Mr. Mackenzie's work of that spirit of "academicism" which withers the life out of many of the subtlest intelligences bred in our universities, the spirit which is always balancing to produce an equipoise, afraid lest strong judgment should be mistaken for rashness or partiality, and who, removed from the stress and strain of practical life, necessary for good philosophy as for all other human work, cultivate in its place a holy calm of philosophic indifference, which allows no good works to issue.

OHN A. HOBSON.

A PLEA FOR LIBERTY. Edited by Thomas Mackay. Second Edition. London: John Murray, 1891.

The feelings of satisfaction which this book on the whole inspires cannot be said to be unmixed. It makes out, no doubt, a heavy case against Socialism and excessive Collectivism. But in several places the reader feels that more might have been made of the position, and that the victory is due to the weakness of the adversary, more than to good strategy on the part of the individualist leaders.

This volume consists of thirteen essays of very varying merits. Mr. Herbert Spencer contributes an introduction, written with his usual clearness and brilliancy. It admits frankly the evils which at present beset competitive industry, and makes its chief point out of the increased slavery which a Socialistic system would involve for the worker. Mr. Spencer predicts a tyrannous bureaucracy, and points to the complaints already made in trade-unions to this effect. (The great tendency of democracies to distrust their leaders may perhaps lead us to doubt if these complaints mean much.) The common objection has been the reverse of Mr. Spencer's,—that a democratic Socialism would not leave enough freedom to the captains of industry. The path runs, in fact, between the two dangers, and any deviation on either side would be almost sure to be disastrous.

Mr. Robertson on the Impracticability of Socialism is clear, but not very original. It might have been better if he could have found room for some demonstration that Socialism was not only impracticable but unnecessary. One of the strongest weapons of Socialism is its cry that the rich are growing richer and the poor poorer, and a summary of Mr. Giffen's telling statistics on this point seems wanted to complete the consideration of the question. The doctrine of distribution according to "social labor times," which Mr. Robertson attacks, quoting it from Schäffle's "Quintessence," is now, we believe, abandoned by the leading English Socialists.

Mr. Donisthorpe's article on the Limits of Liberty is, perhaps, the most interesting piece of work in the book. His attempt to prove inductively the law that state interference tends to decrease in extensity and increase in intensity is thoughtful and forcible. He wisely rejects the tempting, but dangerous, attempt to find some general formula which will limit the functions of the state, and works *a posteriori* with very interesting results.

Mr. Howell devotes his essay on Liberty for Labor to careful discrimination. He approves of further legislation on protection from, and compensation for, injuries received by workmen, holding, apparently, that, even in bargains between economic equals, a man has no right to contract to undergo preventable dangers. He also demands more sanitary legislation, but protests against a compulsory eight hours' day, and objects to the extension of the factory acts to home industries. He appears to think that the latter would be driven out of the field by them. Without any great originality, Mr. Howell's views are well put, and derive much importance from his position. On the closing of the books of the Docker's Union he says, "The monopoly of the land, or the Upper Chamber of the Legislature, sinks into insignificance by the side of this unexampled piece of wicked stupidity on the part of the new leaders, the apostles of the new trade-unionism."

Mr. Fairfield brings heavy charges against State Socialism in the Antipodes. It seems impossible for any one to say anything on Australasian politics without receiving an immediate contradiction. In some cases, however, Mr. Fairfield has succeeded in making damaging attacks on the state socialists by taking their own admissions. The essays, on the Discontent of the Working Classes, by Mr. Vincent, on the Housing of the Working Classes, by Mr. Raffalovich, and on Investment, by the editor, contain some interesting economic facts, but do not contribute much to the discussion of the general principle.

Mr. Millar's essay on the post-office is perhaps the weakest in the book. In his argument for private enterprise he neglects to consider that the saving effected by a single postal service is so great that private companies would inevitably combine, and that the result would be a monopoly whose profits would go, not as now to the state, but to private individuals. And the comparison of the cost of telegrams sent by railways on their own service with those sent by the post-office, completely ignores the fact that the railway companies have to deliver their messages by hand at various distances.

The treatment of Free Education, by Mr. Alford, and of Free Libraries, by Mr. O'Brien, calls for no special notice. Mr. Beauchamp Gordon tells clearly and well the failure of the act of 1886 to control electric lighting. This essay is interesting as an illustration of the truth that the attempt to throw indefinite burdens on capital in the interest of the public can only succeed with capital already specialized, and only then at the cost of stopping all influx of fresh capital into the harassed trade.

Mr. Auberon Herbert ends the book with a rather disappointing essay on the True Line of Deliverance, in the course of which he professes a belief that the Wages Fund Theory is not as dead as has been supposed. If this sort of economics is all that the defenders of individualism have to give us, it is time to congratulate the Socialists. It is no longer possible to retort *ad homines* that people who believe in Marx have no right to quarrel with the densest ignorance of economics. Whatever may be thought of Fabian applications, the knowledge of economics possessed by the younger Socialist leaders is such as to render Mr. Herbert's antiquarianism a grave danger to the side with which he is connected.

J. ELLIS McTAGGART.