

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL THOUGHT

erson has proceeded in his own way. He has had personal experience, which to him has been sufficient. Often he has been motivated by a sense of injustice, and stung into fervid thought by circumstances which he has judged to be unfair. As a result, he has concocted a makeshift remedy, or impulsively accepted a ready-made program. Perhaps he has believed in a single cause for all social ills and in consequence has prescribed a single remedy for all social diseases. Usually he has been very limited in his observations, untrained in making accurate deductions, and hence, narrow and intolerant in his conclusions. Either he has been entirely non-plussed or else he has felt cocksure.

The practicalist is often a poor theorist. He may be even the most dangerous type of theorist. He has scoffed at genuine theory so long that he has fallen into the pit of insound theory. He has failed to see, for example, that a bridge does not project itself across a chasm, or that just anyone cannot build a substantial bridge. He is blind to the role of scientific engineering in bridge-building. With social practicalists calling theorists names instead of respecting sound theory and putting their shoulders to the wheels of broad-minded and scientifically derived theories of social development, civilization has floundered and social problems have piled up, mountain high.

Another difficulty in the pathway of sound social thinking is found in the absence of proper intellectual backgrounds. People are prone to offer solutions for social questions without first equipping themselves with a knowledge of social processes and laws. Moreover, they are often unwilling to acquaint themselves with this necessary knowledge. Only by accident, however, can current social problems be understood unless the historical sequences of social cause and effect are perceived. Nearly all social questions today are essentially the outcroppings of tendencies which have had a long human history. A current social maladjustment is generally indicative of a long line of antecedent factors. A knowledge of societary processes is essential to sound thinking about present-day evils. A history of social thought furnishes a minimum of background materials for the understanding of today's baffling social dilemmas.

THE NATURE OF SOCIAL THOUGHT

While social action may be greedily needed, yet social action that does not emerge from thorough-going social thinking is dangerous. Social action that springs from blind desire or irritated convictions is as likely to do harm as it is to do good. A knowledge of the history of social experiences and of the social thought which grows out of social experiences is basic to wise social action.

SOCIAL THOUGHT DEFINED

In the strict sense, social thought is the product of the thinking together of socii or of associates. Most social thought is of the ordinary dinner table variety, that is, casual and desultory. Most social thought in the sense of group thought about social questions has contributed little to knowledge. Discussion-group thinking illustrates social thinking on its higher levels, but discussion-group thinking is not yet extensive.¹ However, a great deal may be expected from it in the future. In fact, in countries that preserve freedom of speech, it promises to become ultimately the main type of thought.

As far as the past and the present are concerned, social thought amounts, as a rule, to the thought about social questions by individual persons. In this sense, social thought is thinking about societary problems by one or a few persons here and there in human history or at the present. This book as a history of social thought will deal for the most part with the thinking of certain persons about associative life and its problems. With this meaning the term *social thought* will hereafter be used, unless otherwise indicated.

The thinking of persons about social life falls into three categories: (1) that involving the advancement of human groups as groups; (2) that referring to the manipulation of human beings to the gain of a special clique or group; and (3) that which aims to analyze the underlying social processes and laws irrespective of the effects of such analyses or the uses to which they are put.

¹ A practical exposition of social group thinking may be found in Harrison S. Elliott, *The Process of Group Thinking. An Introduction to the Theory Underlying Social Thinking* has been advanced by M. P. Follette, *Creative Experiences*.