

PEACE IN INDUSTRY

(By Harry Thomson)

It is a little difficult to believe that the Peace in Industry Conference so happily inaugurated in Melbourne this week has not been influenced in idea by the recent congress in England on Industrial Reorganisation and Industrial Relations. It is impossible to believe that the Melbourne Conference cannot learn much from its English prototype. That was a conference composed equally of employers and the General Council of the Trade Union Congress, convened privately by Lord Melchett in December last. It presented its first interim report in July, and this was overwhelmingly adopted by the Trade Union Congress recently held at Swansea.

The report is much too long even to attempt to summarise, but certain outstanding features should be referred to, particularly in the light of their possible utility in Australia. Those features fall naturally into one of two branches—organisation or agenda.

So far as organisation is concerned a National Industrial Council has been set up composed of an equal number of employees (nominated by the Council of the Trade Union Congress from time to time) and the employers (nominated by the two great employers' organisations in England).

This Council is to meet once a quarter, is to establish a standing joint committee for the appointment of joint conciliation boards (for the prevention or remedying of disputes), and to establish and direct machinery for continuous investigation into industrial problems.

Joint Conciliation Boards

The joint conciliation boards, it is expected, will be extraordinarily useful for the settlement of disputes in particular industries, and incidentally will be much consulted and relied on by the Government in the event of any such dispute.

On the side of agenda a particularly useful programme has been outlined. There are eight main heads as follows:—The organisation of Industrial Relations (including trade union recognition and victimisation), unemployment, distribution of the proceeds of commodities and services, organisation technique and control of industry, finance, constitutional, international, and miscellaneous (including health, housing, education, and research).

And now for the application of all this to Australia. The conference will have to start out with certain basic assumptions. On the employers' side there must be full and free recognition of trade unions, and a preservation as far as possible of the standard of living. On the employees' side must be the equally frank recognition that, while a principal function of the trade union is to acquire a fair and just proportion of the proceeds of labor for its members, this can be done effectively only by going farther and concerning itself with the prosperity of industry.

It must realise that even the trade union has more use for an efficient industry than a derelict one, and that it should have a voice as to the way industry is carried on. Given those assumptions, it must next be recognised that there is no royal road to an easy solution, and no panacea, but that the problems are difficult, are complex, and can be settled only by much work. This of itself necessitates a permanent organisation, even if it only be a sort of secretariat.

Problems of Australian Industry

Large representative bodies can meet only occasionally, and can merely discuss principles or adopt or modify reports. They cannot possibly deal with detail. All the spade work must be done between meetings by some sort of a joint committee that cannot possibly be too efficient.

Having got a permanent organisation, the present Peace in Industry Conference can probably do best service by drawing up an agenda or list of problems for this committee, giving them in order of urgency. Among such problems the following can be suggested as peculiarly applicable to Australian industry:—

Increase of productivity (particularly by what is called rationalisation of particular industries to eliminate overlapping and waste), unemployment, price control, profit sharing, piecework or payment by results, banking, and the proper utilisation of finance, external competition.

These are, of course, only suggestive, and can do no doubt be greatly added to. The whole thing can be done only piecemeal and probably by separate organisation inside each particular industry or group of industries.

All this is to some extent a matter of detail. Probably the most important thing is to have it recognised (and repeated) that labor unions having won the right to collective bargaining not merely have a need for their own purposes to take part in the economic councils of the nation but a duty to the nation to assist in such councils.

Labor's Surplus Energy

Labor has too long had insufficient outlet constructively for its surplus energy. For that reason it has seemed to be demoralised. This may be the very opportunity for a complete Renaissance, without which there can be no growth and no advance.

One aspect of the whole problem that occurs is this. The arbitration courts have been concerned too much with the idea of "cases" and too little with conciliation. On the Federal Arbitration Court are good and highly paid brains, but an immense part of their time has gone in listening to great masses of evidence which, putting it bluntly, is led only to instruct the judges in regard to the details and practices—all of which are known by both sides to the dispute in the particular industry concerned.

The hearing of cases in the manner of compulsory arbitration as at present should be only one function, and by no means the most important, of a much wider Department of Industry, concerned with all the matters mentioned above. A wise supervision exercised over conciliation boards (composed of both sides) would probably be much more effective, and would leave a great deal of time for other not less important problems connected with industry.

The Court staff and records would also form a nucleus for a staff and for an information bureau, and the whole orientation of such a department would be toward the future, constructive and remedial.

NATURE OF THE WORLD

(By Prof. Kerr Grant, M.Sc.)

Prof. Albert Eddington, the present occupant of the Plumian Chair of Astronomy in Cambridge University, is distinguished alike for his contributions to mathematical, physical, and astronomical science, and for his brilliant powers of exposition of the most abstruse theories of modern physics.

In his latest book, "The Nature of the Physical World," which contains the substance of the Gifford lectures in Natural Theology delivered at the University of Edinburgh in 1927, he has excelled all previous efforts in presenting the latest scientific viewpoints in a way intelligible even to those who have not the mathematical equipment necessary to enable them to follow the original discussions.

Even where he ventures beyond the safe ground of positive scientific facts and theories into the dubious regions of their philosophical and religious import his language has a clarity and definiteness of meaning which are, to a scientific reader, in welcome contrast to the obscurity of the metaphysical jargon employed by the transcendentalist school of philosophic thinkers.

Eddington's perfect mastery of the substance of his theme, "the philosophic outcome of the great changes of scientific thought which have recently come about," is matched by the excellence of his literary style and an extraordinary command of aptly chosen metaphor and literary allusion which will make the reading of the book a delight to those who may stumble over its scientific profundities.

The first eleven chapters of the book constitute an unequalled exposition of modern scientific theory and of the revolution which has resulted from the new views of space and time-measurement which we owe in the first place to the genius of Einstein, and from the remarkable discoveries regarding the electrical constitution of material atoms and of the nature of the interaction between the electrical particles which constitute them and the waves of light which they emit or receive, expressed in the quantum theory originated by the German professor Planck, and developed by German men of science with amazing rapidity and comprehensiveness to include a wide range of hitherto unexplainable optical, thermal, and electrical phenomena.

It is safe to say that no clearer or more convincing proof of the inutilty of metaphysical concepts and the advantage of replacing them by the definite measurable quantities with which physics alone should concern itself has ever been given than the demonstration of the superiority of the Einsteinian geometrical explanation of gravitational effects as due to a metrical distortion of the space-time framework to which the motions of bodies are referred in the new relativistic mechanics over the Newtonian invocation of a metaphysical "force of gravitation."

Until recently the law of cause and effect has been regarded as the very backbone of all scientific explanations, and its apparent invariability has been a stumbling block to the doctrine of free will and moral responsibility in human action.

But this stumbling block, we are now told, has been removed by the discovery that the electrons in their courses are at times endowed with an entire freedom of movement, and "jump" from one orbit in the atom to another for no cause whatsoever. Only on the assumption of such irresponsible behaviour is it possible to derive correctly the actually observed laws governing the emission and absorption of light by matter.

But, worse than this, there is, according to the brilliant young German physicist Heisenberg, a "principle of indeterminacy" in the physical world, which reads:—"A particle may have position or it may have velocity, but it cannot in any exact sense have both."

Space will not permit of elucidation here of this extraordinary and apparently paradoxical statement. But it is evident that, if its validity is admitted, it strikes at the very root of the principle of causation and justifies the remark that "the question whether from a complete knowledge of the past we can predict the future does not arise, because a complete knowledge of the past involves a self-contradiction."

With the philosophical inferences which he draws from these scientific generalisations the main body of scientific opinion will, I believe, be in general agreement. That "the world with which physics deals is a world of symbolic entities," which represents only "a partial aspect of something wider," represents undoubtedly the general view of scientific thinkers. That the principle of causality must, for the reasons given above, be finally abandoned will not, I think, be so freely admitted.

That the physical world is entirely abstract and without "actuality" apart from its linkage and consciousness, and that thus consciousness is restored to a position of fundamental importance, is an obvious corollary.

Undoubtedly, there is in the mind something more, and, if you will, more important and profound, than the perception of sense-data, the formation of scientific concepts for the rational interpretation of these data, and the ratiocinative processes which lead to scientific theories. The mind not only thinks but feels and wills. It makes judgments of "significance" without which, as Eddington says, "we cannot even reach a physical world," and of "values" without which the world would be devoid of all aesthetic, moral, or spiritual aspects.

But when we concede all this there will, unless I misinterpret the scientific attitude of mind today, remain a decided reluctance to follow Eddington in his view that any safe path to the verities of religion leads through the tangled and obscure jungle of mystical experience.

For, apart from the fact that these experiences, while they admittedly lie outside the scope of physical science, cannot escape the scrutiny of the psychologist and the psycho-pathologist, the scientific man cannot but distrust a medium of discovery which in all times and among all races of man has resulted in such a myriad host of fantastic beliefs in every form of magical and supernatural agency as has this same guide of mystical experience.

CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

(By R. C. Bald)

Some students were once asked in an examination paper to express an opinion on a poem which they had never seen before. They did not know when it was written or who had written it. One replied that he was unable to form any estimate of its worth because he did not know who was the author; if he had known that it was by Shakespeare or by Keats he would have been able to express an opinion, but in the absence of such information, all he could do was to remain silent.

This, of course, is an entirely wrong attitude to adopt toward literature. If people praised and valued the work of great and established authors alone, no young writer would ever have a chance of fame, for the simple reason that his work would never be recognised. Fortunately, however such a state of things is not likely to come about, for we, like the Athenians of St. Paul's day, are eager "either to tell or to hear some new thing."

What is a Classic?

Nevertheless, the problem of the student is a real one for many people. If they wish to read only the best, they find it easiest to confine themselves to books and authors of established reputation. To find the best authors among the thousands whose work is coming hot from the press is no light task, and keeping abreast with contemporary literature may often mean that to find one good book at least a dozen bad ones have to be read.

"Life is short," such a person may say quite reasonably, "and one cannot afford to waste 90 per cent. of one's reading. Let us then confine ourselves to the books that have stood the test of time."

It is true that time is the only final arbiter of worth. A classic may be read eagerly at its first appearance, as were the novels of Dickens and Scott; it may be ignored almost totally at first, as were Fitzgerald's "Omar Khayyam" and the early works of Meredith; but if it is read and continues to be read, perhaps by only a few discerning persons, it will become a classic. The classic is a book with a permanent appeal, an appeal not merely to its own generation but to later generations as well.

Changes of Taste

It would seem to follow that a classic will be interesting not only to contemporary readers but to those of future ages. This brings us at once to the problem of forming a judgment on present-day literature and its permanent worth; no one can prophesy with any certainty the interests of the world in two hundred years' time, and something of vital interest to us may seem to future age nothing more than a vast deal of fuss over problems that are dead and gone.

A writer like Bernard Shaw for the first has been pre-occupied with social problems; they permeate his work. Some day, no doubt, the world will have solved them or have ceased to worry about them, and lovers of literature will silently decide whether or no there is enough in his plays apart from those social pre-occupations to give his works enduring vitality. It may be that they will be thought of as documents for the historian to study, and will be hardly regarded as literature at all.

Misjudgments

The literature that endures is generally that which is rooted most firmly in the imperishable facts of human life and character, or, in other words, in the sorrows and laughter, in the hopes and fears of mankind. Even so, a book may be written in the current language of the day and seem to express exactly one's feelings and aspirations, but later on in life one can look back and see that all those feelings have imperceptibly changed, so that one finds that things one once thought permanent were only transitory. The book that expressed these feelings is likewise only of transitory worth.

All critics make mistakes of this kind, and often live to look back with surprise from a distance of 20 years or so, and wonder at the generous praise they bestowed on something that even in their own lifetime they have learned to recognise as worthless. Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, in republishing some early essays not long ago, wisely omitted one in which he hailed the works of Hall Caine as one of the most promising achievements of his time. The years have proved to him that he is wrong, and he has no hesitation in admitting it.

Doubts and Difficulties

Such are some of the pitfalls, then, in trying to appraise the best in contemporary literature. One often appreciates the work of two or three men and follows them up eagerly, disregarding what is being done by others. This is unfortunate, not merely because it is unfair to those who are ignored, but because writers often fail to maintain their standards and fulfil the promise of their early work.

The critics are conservative people, and once a writer has made a reputation, they will go on praising him, regardless of the quality of his work. Within the last few months I have read three books by authors whose work is well worth watching, and each has been highly praised by the critics. Yet I am convinced in my heart of hearts that they are bad books, and represent not an advance on, but a falling away from, former standards. Will these authors yet recover, and write something that will live? Or must one cease to take an interest in them and look elsewhere for what is most significant and permanent in present-day literature? This is a problem of the kind that is always tormenting those who try to keep abreast with the finest things that are being written.

LITERARY CENSORSHIP

(By R. C. Bald, Lecturer in English at Adelaide University)

I have just been reading with great interest "My First Two Thousand Years, or the Autobiography of the Wandering Jew," which the newspapers informed us several days ago the authorities in Melbourne are trying to suppress. It is a clever and fascinating book in which episodes from the most exciting and interesting periods of the world's history are pieced together with a real unity.

The book is as far above the average novel in merit as silver is above copper in value. Although sportive sometimes, and sometimes ironical, it is sincere and thoughtful, and most certainly nowhere obscene for the sake of obscenity. One could without hesitation name half a dozen novels that have been published during the last two years that have been read and discussed by thousands of serious and thoughtful people which the one-eyed moralist would be more likely to condemn than this one, but which, fortunately, have so far escaped the interference of authority.

Everyone knows that some books and pictures are published and circulated in order to appeal deliberately to perverted minds. Such works are intentionally obscene, and every sensible person will admit that they are fit subject matter for the police to deal with. But the book under discussion certainly does not belong to this class, and it is a grave injustice that meddling officialdom should prevent anyone from reading it.

Experts Should Decide

As nearly all the new books that are sold in Australia are printed abroad it falls to the Customs Department to see that prohibited literature does not enter the country. Customs officers are skilful and conscientious in giving effect to their orders, but there is, unfortunately, no competent authority whose business it is to say what may or may not be allowed into Australia.

The Commonwealth Government, if it is going to censor books, should appoint a board of acknowledged experts to decide whether any book is to be prohibited. The decision must not be left, as it is at present, to some busy Government servant, whose very occupation prevents him from giving literature his undivided attention. Censorship of books, if we are to have it at all, must be on the same lines as censorship of films.

The situation is not merely unsatisfactory, but unjust. It would seem that knowledge and information of certain types are available only to the expert, and then only to him if he is prepared to pay for it. It must be withheld from the man in the street. As things are the historian may find out anything he pleases about the perversities of the Borgias, but if a novelist were to portray them in a "plain, unvarnished tale," they would be withheld from the ordinary reader.

Impartial Enquiry Necessary

Similarly, there are certain books which one can possess if one cares to buy them in editions that cost two or three guineas, but those that cost the same number of shillings must not be sold in our bookshops. As a result several of the latest numbers in the famous Everyman's Library have been refused admission.

This situation is not without its humorous side. There is one edition of Boccaccio which is not admitted because of its low price. The publishers have tried as carefully as possible to remove passages to which objection might be taken. Compared with the original, one might almost call it a book for schoolgirls. Yet this cannot enter the country when the complete edition, provided it costs 10 times as much, can do so.

The need for a board of impartial literary experts to decide what books may not enter Australia is imperative. There is one test, and one only, which they should apply. If a book is palpably and deliberately obscene it should be suppressed. If, on the other hand, it is a sincere portrayal of the truth, past or present, or a genuine discussion of the problems, however unpleasant, that beset the human race, it is an entirely unwarrantable interference with the liberty of the individual not to admit it.

Effect on Intellectual Life

We are accustomed sometimes to thank God we are not as others are when we hear of the effects of prohibition in America and read reports of Dayton trials and such like; yet, unless we are carefully open-minded we shall have imposed on us another and more serious kind of prohibition which will ultimately stifle the intellectual life of Australia.

The evil effects of prohibition of any sort have been recognised by all the great moralists. Even Milton, the greatest of Puritans, in pleading such a cause as this, wrote, "He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true wayfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat."

THE UNIVERSITY

(By Harry Thomson)

In the Governor's Speech at the opening of Parliament this week it was announced that the Exhibition land was being set aside for the University. This calls attention to one of the most silent but at the same time most significant developments in Adelaide during the last decade, for in that short time on or just back from North terrace, as well as at Urbrae, a whole series of University buildings has been created.

It calls attention, too, to a real difference between the universities in Australia and the older universities in England. In England the professions are largely self-contained, self-administered, and self-educated. The four Inns of Court are the only gates to the Bar, and, like the English Law Society, conduct their own systems of education and their own examinations.

In the medical profession only a small percentage qualifies at Oxford or Cambridge. The same applies to the clergy, the dentists, and the teachers. In Australia it is completely different. In this State, for example, all lawyers must spend three or more years at the University, where their examinations are taken.

Board of Examiners

What is called the Board of Examiners consists of a committee of practising lawyers, and in 99 cases out of a hundred simply checks the formal credentials of candidates and reports accordingly to the Court. In the medical profession the students spend six years taking lectures and examinations actually at the University.

Engineering is much the same. Teachers attend the same lectures, and take the same examination as other undergraduates in arts. Waite Institute is as practical as can well be, and in addition until recently—but unfortunately no longer—a Forestry School was conducted in association with the University. These examples are only illustrative, but they are illustrative of an important fact—that is, that the centre of a great deal of professional life inside the respective professions is and will increasingly be the University.

That may be a bad thing in some respects for the professions in taking away from the professional organisations a great deal of the social intercourse and the personal associations that are inevitable when a profession looks after its own students, but it is a good thing for the University, and that in spite of the overwhelming practical bias that these courses give the University outlook.

The University is for all practical purposes the sole and exclusive centre of all professional training, and therefore has tended to become pre-eminently an institution for turning out efficient tradesmen for the different professions.

University Problems

The danger is that the other side—the humanities—may be forgotten, and possibly this is the greatest problem the universities have after finance. It is at present partly being met by imposing a high matriculation standard, which at least compels a modicum of general culture, on all undergraduates at the beginning of their course. And certain of the degree courses also postulate one or two subjects of general culture.

At all costs this must be preserved and possibly strengthened. Australia has got beyond the pioneering stage and is, if anything, continuing too long to be exclusively practical in outlook. And a great many of the practical problems that touch the personal life have been already met.

Professional Education

With this trend, however, there are marked advantages in having professional education controlled by the University. A legal education conducted wholly by the legal profession would tend to become almost entirely legal and therefore rigid and narrow. Much the same would apply to the other professions. At the University at least the students in different faculties mix, and at least such of the humanities as are taught get a chance to spill over.

And with the growth of residential colleges and the development of the University Union and such organisations all this is intensified. There is created scope for the real education that arises by the clash of mind on mind, as well as the more formal book learning of the classrooms.

The proposal to form a University Union Club, more or less on the lines of the famous Oxford Union Society, is but symptomatic. The Oxford Union has been the nursery of many of the leaders in British Governments and public life. Gladstone, Asquith, Birkenhead, leap to memory as examples. Embryo doctor and lawyer, embryo engineer and cleric will at least have a chance to hammer out the application of their various theories to the practical problems of the community.

Idealism and Knowledge

In the welter of personalities, the needless party friction, and the confused thinking that characterise so much of our public and Parliamentary life today the only hope is in idealism and knowledge. Where better than in a university can these be developed? And by whom better than the future leaders in all the different professions that go to make up the community?

Exceptions excepted, most of us have formed or chosen our principles and our outlook in the early twenties. What follows after is rather the adaptation and the application of principle and the filling in of detail as we build up our philosophy of life. Australia is almost unique in having all its professional men of necessity passing through a university, and the effect of this has never been worked out.

Apart from administrative problems most of the legislation that really matters (and in bulk that is only a small percentage) simply crystallises and sanctions what has become the custom or at least the more or less articulate desire of the general community. In creating this custom and formulating this desire the professional classes are or ought to be natural leaders. As the intellectual mother of these leaders the influence of the University cannot be estimated but must be predominant. No part of the national resources can be better utilised than in extending its influence.