

AUSTRALIAN PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS

A STUDY BY PROFESSOR HANCOCK

"Australia." By W. K. Hancock, Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, and Professor of Modern History in the University of Adelaide. London: Ernest Benn.

Professor Hancock's book is an important addition to the valuable series of volumes by leading authorities on "The Modern World." His work is the thirteenth so far published, and in its scope and the manner of treating his subject it conforms closely to the aim of the series, which is "to provide a balanced survey, with such historical illustrations as are necessary, of the tendencies and forces, political, economic, intellectual, which are moulding the lives of contemporary States." Professor Hancock does this for Australia in an admirable way. It is not an excessive compliment which the publishers pay him when they state that his book is "the first complete appraisal and interpretation of the Australian nation." The wide range it covers may be gathered from the headings of the four parts into which the fourteen chapters are arranged—Foundations, Political Economy, Politics, and Civilisation. There are in addition six small maps, a short list of dates in Australia's history, notes on books, and a useful index. The work is not a formal or systematic history, but, as the author explains, its method is historical, and it presents with much lucidity in regular order the principal stages in Australian settlement and progress. In his preface Professor Hancock tells us that his chief difficulty in writing the book was to combine intellectual detachment with his emotional attachment to Australia. He certainly succeeded in overcoming this difficulty. Only one who has lived in the midst of the conditions described, and given them his constant and interested attention, could furnish so full and faithful an account of them, but while the author often writes with warm sympathy as well as clear understanding, he has been at pains to observe political and economic events and developments coolly and from every point of view, and the general tone of the book is studiously judicial. For this very reason Australian readers with partisan views of a pronounced and aggressive character may occasionally be disappointed with his descriptions and conclusions, and object to the careful and dispassionate manner in which he considers every aspect, and balances one side against the other in the scales of a nice impartiality. But the value of the book to genuine seekers after knowledge lies in its freedom from bias and prejudice, and its deliberate omission of party coloring. At the same time, the work is not dull or heavily professorial. It is packed with interesting facts, conclusions, and speculations, and throughout is eminently readable.

Water, Wool, and Wheat

In his first chapter Professor Hancock shows how wool opened in the early days of Australia a field for the stupendous energies of England's economic imperialism, and led to the establishment of an industry which to this day remains "the corner-stone of Australia's economic and social edifice." Australian pastoralists have now almost reached their farthest frontiers. "If to this day one-fifth of Australia remains completely unoccupied, that is because it is scarcely worth occupying." One-

half of our continent, including that fifth which "even the most magnanimous geographers must class as desert, is arid country." But Australians, the author points out, contemplate their vast open spaces without feelings of depression. "The great majority of them live in a genial environment, and their hopeful gaze has been fixed upon nearer frontiers. Within these nearer frontiers there has taken place a real settling, the 'concentration' of which the systematic colonisers dreamed." Professor Hancock deals with the problem of low rainfall, the limits of the relief afforded by artesian supplies, the long struggle between the farmer and the squatter, the introduction of animal and vegetable pests, and the reckless destruction of forests. The futile issue of the movement to "bust the big estates" is explained not by the villainy of the pastoralists or the stupidity of legislators, but by the ineluctable fact that large sheep-runs paid better than small farms. "This was true, fifty years ago, even in districts which to-day are hospitable to a flourishing agriculture. South Australia was the exception which proved the rule. Democratic land legislation succeeded there because yeoman-farming was profitable there. The plains and highlands which stretch north and north-west from Adelaide offer exceptional advantages for wheat culture. Beyond these plains and highlands democratic legislation failed as signally as it failed in New South Wales. When the South Australian farmers tried to press beyond Goyder's Line, which roughly marks the limit of twelve inches of rainfall, the favor of their Governments did not avail to save them from ruin." However, science and invention and the resourcefulness of the practical farmer have succeeded where Parliaments failed. The wheatgrowers "are still pushing the large graziers further into the hinterland. Machinery, manures, and experimental breeding of seed, have added millions of acres to the kingdom of wheat in Australia; and the end is not yet."

Socialism and Protection

Several fascinating chapters are devoted to the emergence of political ideas which have governed the economic experiences of Australia. There is an explanation of the reasons why in a new country like Australia, with its vast distances and the difficulties its handful of pioneers had to contend with, the natural tendency was towards a collective action which, with the acquisition of power by urban democrats, developed into various forms of State Socialism. The greater part of Australia could only be opened even for sparse settlement by heavy initial expenditure. Who was to undertake this, if not the State? Government became responsible for communications, fought drought by water storage, and placed settlers on the land. But the majority of Australians were not pioneers either in pastoral or agricultural pursuits. "The dominant theme in Australian political history is the lament of an unsatisfied land hunger. This theme swells angrily in the decades which follow the gold-rushes, when men who have been their own masters on the diggings fight for a farmer's independence and are driven back—partly by vested interests and bad laws, chiefly by forces of economics and geography, which cannot be altered by the laws. Yet the defeated ones are not altogether inconsolable. They have, at any rate, possessed themselves of the State. Within ten years of the discovery of gold, practically the whole political programme of the Chartists is realised in the Australian colonies. What class, what tradition is there in Australia, which can hold the State against the assault of numbers?" So it happens that the Australian democracy comes to look upon the State as a vast public utility, whose duty it is to provide the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Here we have the genesis of that peculiar and distinctive manifestation of the socialistic idea

which treats the State as an embodiment of "collective power at the service of individualistic rights." The Australian sees no opposition between his individualism and his reliance upon Government. Whether or not the two tendencies will exist together so comfortably when the frontiers are finally drawn, when occupation has slackened into settlement, and the Australian begins to feel himself cramped for elbow-room, is another question." It is shown by the author that State Government was the instrument with which Australian democracy first fashioned its experimental Socialism. But control of the Federal Government is now the great prize of political struggle. The radical forces early realised that the Federal Parliament must occupy the dominant position in Australian politics. "It alone could guarantee the isolation necessary for those experiments which were to demonstrate to the world the possibility of social justice. It could restrict the entry of aliens; it could tax the entry of goods. Some day, perhaps, it might make itself the chief experimenter." The preachers of unification would, if they could, stake everything on the fight for the control of a central and dominant Parliament. Meanwhile, through the employment of the Federal power, Australian democracy has endeavored to safeguard itself, first, by a ring-fence of immigration restriction, and, secondly, by a similar fence of tariff protection.

White Australia and "The New Protection"

An illuminating account is given of the White Australia policy, founded on the twofold argument of economic and racial necessity, and of Deakin's "New Protection" scheme. "The 'Old' Protection," explained Deakin, "contented itself with making good wages possible. The 'new' Protection seeks to make them actual. . . . Having put the manufacturer into a position to pay good wages, it goes on to assure the public that he does pay them." The neat fiscal devices designed by Deakin to accomplish this purpose were declared unconstitutional by the High Court, but since then the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration has been entrusted with the task of giving a practical meaning to the ideal of "fair and reasonable" wages and conditions of labor. Professor Hancock subjects to a minute analysis the Australian attempt by Protection and industrial arbitration to escape from the pressure of the natural economic forces. Space does not permit of following in detail his elaborate exposition of the facts and the inferences he deduces from them, but some of his pregnant observations, though somewhat injured by severance from the context, may be profitably quoted. He remarks, for example, on the obvious danger of piling "the residuary irrevocable cost of Protection upon the export industries," and on the fact that "under an extensive tariff one industry's protection becomes increasingly visible as another industry's cost. . . . There tends to be a drift towards a position in which nearly all industries enjoy Protection; but, obviously, before this position has been reached, Protection will have ceased to protect." Professor Hancock quotes freely from the report of Mr. Bruce's expert committee on "The Australian Tariff," and he says:—"All Australian economists endorse the warnings which the Tariff Board has uttered in recent years. All of them are agreed that the soaring costs of Protection are menacing Australian prosperity. The guardians of Australian orthodoxy have thought it necessary to refute these exasperating calculations, but the great majority of Australians is unaware that there is anything to refute. The Australians are a good-tempered, open-handed people. They dislike refusing favors, and they do not count costs. Within a few months of the appearance of 'The Australian

Tariff' they voted, by an overwhelming majority, for more Protection."

Social Legislation and Party Politics

Chapters are devoted by the author to the shifting balance of the Constitution, State Socialism, filling the vast open spaces, the "standard of living" the Labor Party, "the parties of resistance," foreign policy, some aspects of society in a new country, and literature and art. The weakness of State Socialism, as he indicates, lies in the confusion of politics and business. This is especially illustrated in the case of the railways. It might perhaps be possible, observes the author, by comparing the experience and experiments of other countries with those of Australia, to discover a just mean between the two principles of popular control and business efficiency, but it is certain that Australia has dangerously exalted the first at the expense of the second. "Australian Governments, although they represent the collective wisdom of well-educated communities, have given evidence, in their economic ventures, of two particular weaknesses." The first is inept administration. But the second weakness is more deep-seated. "The failures of State paternalism have been due less frequently to the miscalculations of administrators than to the pressures put upon the administrators by the politicians, and upon the politicians by their constituents." Dealing with the rapid growth of the public debt, the author enquires whether it has been justified by a corresponding addition to the productive power of the community, and refers to the repeated warnings of the Auditors-General of the various States that the Governments are not getting from loan enterprises their money's worth. The history of Australian trade unionism, the rise and development of the Labor Party, and the chronic contest between moderates and extremists is related in an interesting manner. "It is the political misfortune of the Labor Party that its old nationalistic doctrines appealed directly and powerfully to the instinct of the Australian people, whereas its new socialistic doctrines are repugnant to their instinct. For the socialism which is defined in the party's objective is orthodox socialism, the sort of socialism which the believers of Germany or Italy profess; it is a European product. But the old Australian experimentalism which some people called socialism was not really socialism at all; it was rather the practical utilitarianism preached by John Stuart Mill in his later days, running towards State action under the pressure of circumstances. Australians understood that sort of thing ('It is my brand of socialism,' said Fisher) and still understand it. It has become almost part of their national character. The practical men of the Labor Party understand this character perfectly, and wish they were free from the embarrassing doctrines thrust upon them by the idealists." That is why in practice they try to ignore these doctrines, and keep in the background the objective of "the socialisation of industry, production, distribution, and exchange" adopted by Labor in 1921.

Party Divisions

The practical men of the Labor party seek to appease the extremists (or the idealists, as Professor Hancock calls them), "without terrifying the electorate," for they know that if the extremists get out of hand Labor will not long remain in office. "The politicians of Labor try to keep a just balance between their left-wing supporters and the floating vote in the constituencies." But, as the author shows, if there are divided purposes and an absence of unity as regards policy in the Labor ranks, similar divisions mark the "parties of resistance"—Nationalists, Liberals, and Country Party. The last, like Labor, has a well-defined class basis, while the Nationalist Party is a federation of divergent and sometimes conflicting interests—of regional interests (such as the Queensland sugar interest), manufacturing and commercial interests, city interests and country interests, and countless fragmented special interests in both city and country. "It is an immense simplification of politics that these groups should struggle to assert themselves within a party to which they confess a common loyalty, rather than that each should assert its own separate identity and fight for its own particular spoil over quicksands of dissolving combinations amidst ever-changing packs of covetousness. But the system has its own dangers. It does not favor resolute and decided leadership." By those who do not know Australia Professor Hancock's book will be welcomed as a complete, lucid, and impartial exposition of its historic development and current problems; but Australians also will find it stimulating and instructive.

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Both Parties Attack State Education Vote

MEMBERS of all parties made a spirited attack on the Government's proposal to spend £340,000 on education when the Budget debate was resumed in the Assembly yesterday. Mr. Reidy (Lab.) moved that the proposed grant of £14,200 to the University should be further cut to £4,200, but was defeated. The Premier (Mr. Hill) said the Finance Advisory Committee, assisted by three other experts, had been instructed to investigate thoroughly the working of the Education Department. While a reduction in expenditure was desirable, efficiency should not be disturbed. Already the services of 150 temporary teachers had been dispensed with. Some of the suggestions made by members

- By Mr. Anthony (Lib.)—That the qualifying certificate examination should be replaced by an examination for entrance to high schools, thus saving thousands of pounds.
- By Mr. Butterfield (Lab.)—That travelling allowances should not be allowed to high school children whose parents could afford to pay. Women teachers, except as assistants, should not be sent to country schools.
- By Mr. Thompson (Lab.)—That greater use should be made of central or super-primary schools.
- By Mr. Cameron (C.P.)—That the automatic increases in salaries should cease for the present.
- By Mr. Reidy—That it would be better still further to cut the grant to the Univer-

- sity and leave the grant to the Institutes Association untouched.
 - By Mr. Collins (Lab.)—That the grant of £3,000 for night classes should be spread over the whole State.
 - By Mr. Lyons (Lib.)—That it was more necessary for the University to function properly than for institutes to have a few extra books.
- ### COST GREATER IN COUNTRY
- The Premier said the cost of education a head was greater in the country than the city. Any further reduction in the University grant would seriously embarrass that institution. The £3,000 for night classes was to enable teachers to study for their arts course.