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TRIBUNE

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Economic Ideals

The Ideal Foundations of Economic Thought. (Three Essays on the Philosophy of Economics.) By W. Stark. Kegan Paul. 15/-.

HOW did it come about that man's endeavour to find better ways of satisfying his own and his fellow beings' needs developed into a science which came to regard the study of facts as an end worth substituting for the quest of what is good? Dr. W. Stark, in another of the excellent volumes of the "International Library of Sociology and Social Reconstruction," traces this derailment of the philosophy of economics. *The Ideal Foundations of Economic Thought* is a useful and inspiring contribution to our building of a better future. The author presents three pairs of thinkers: Locke and Leibniz, Hodgskin and Thompson, Gossen and Jennings, and lets them speak for themselves, demonstrating how their words and ideas uprooted accepted traditions, or pushed economic philosophy forward along new channels. His own contribution, apart from the careful selection of the original words, is restrained and dignified; he pilots his historical figures, asks questions and lets them answer, puts forward propositions and lets them contradict or support them.

Against a background where an adolescent tolerance and democracy fought their initial battles with the divine right of kings, Locke formulated the rights and needs of the individual. It became the life work of the German professor's son, Leibniz, to develop the theory which proclaimed that "nothing is more in the proper interest of private men than to embrace the general interest of the public, and we gratify ourselves if we delight in promoting the true advantages of mankind." Locke's sober reasoning cleared the way for Leibniz's social idealism, and the synthesis of the two formed the basis of what is known as classical economics. Realism and idealism in happy synthesis opened the door to the twin ends of liberty and equality. However, what seemed in the middle of the eighteenth century to be an approaching millennium dwindled into a distant ideal as the first buzzing wheels of the industrial revolution began to turn.

The same year that Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was published, Watt's steam engine started to work. Large scale industry spread, and the gap between the possessing and the dispossessed grew wider; the glorious vision of harmony faded, and the slogans of hostile classes mingled with the noise of hideous workshops in the mushroom towns of the new industrial era. Western Europe moved towards large-scale capitalist production and the ideals of liberty and equality became irreconcilable.

When the work of the industrial revolution was done Thomas Hodgskin found economic liberty assured, but he could no longer discover any trace of social equality. He believed that by a process of social levelling equality would be re-established, and the twin ideals of liberty and equality would meet again. William Thompson could not share his optimism; Locke's two ideals had been divorced and during the whole course of the nineteenth century thinkers had endeavoured in vain to find a platform upon which to unite them. In view of the actual development of society the choice between them became imperative. In the end Hodgskin became the apologist of the

libertarian ideal, of *laissez-faire* capitalism, and Thompson adopted the ideal of equality, the first step along the road that ultimately leads to Socialism. The cross-road had been reached.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, not the "best of all possible worlds," the antagonism of classes emerged as the leading factor in modern society. The gap between the actual and the ideal widened, and to avoid the choice the majority of modern economists produced a mental alibi in the fashionable theory that political economy—like physical sciences—is not a social philosophy, and is not concerned with the happiness of mankind.

The works of Gossen and Jennings illustrate this further departure from the old ideal. Unwilling to face the need for redistribution of social wealth, they could only land in the cautious reformist's cul-de-sac.

"In a society of artisans," Dr. Stark writes, "it has been the demand for a just division of the national wealth among all; in a society of proletarians it must be the call for the full concentration of the means of production in the hands of the community."

TIBOR MENDE.

Soviet Asia

Soviet Asia. By R. A. Davies and A. J. Steiger. Gollancz. 7/6.

IN an age of misleading generalisations and tedious formulae, it is refreshing to find a book which combines brilliant factual presentation with an analysis of the principles and ideas responsible for the transformation of Soviet Asia. Soviet Asia has unlimited natural resources; for example, Angora and other Buriat-Mongolian rivers can generate more than 5,000,000 kilowatts of electricity per annum, a capacity five times greater than that of the Tennessee Valley administration in the United States.

The unlimited natural resources of these vast regions, with only six people per square mile (compared with 42 in the U.S.A. and 400 in Japan) were hardly touched before the October Revolution. The population of Soviet Asia was too backward to develop its immense potentialities. The October Revolution brought help: the Russians comprising the majority of the Soviet Union, began to organise, educate and develop the smaller nations of the Union. "One of the great lessons to be learnt from the Central Asiatics is, that with the aid of friendly people more advanced industrially, an economically backward people can progress directly and rapidly to the age of the machine, the radio, and the airplane." (p. 98.)

Soviet Asia and its achievements would be impossible outside the frame of Soviet Planned Economy. The authors show clearly that undeveloped countries and backward people have to rely on economic planning for their rapid industrial and agricultural development much more than highly industrialised countries. The experience of Soviet Asia should serve as a guide to all Colonial administrators.

Finally the book stresses the importance of Soviet Asia, as the bridge between China, India, Canada and America. Soviet Asia will serve as a model for the Asiatic peoples and will help them to find their place in the international order of the future. The book

shows that this order can only be built on the foundations of organised and planned economy, resting on collaboration and mutual aid, and not on competition and strife.

The book will be a valuable addition to any library, and for everyone interested in the Asiatic part of the Soviet Union, in planning and in Socialism.

N. BAROU.

About the Country

Country Life. By H. E. Bates. Penguin. 9d.

MR. H. E. BATES is not only one of the most skilled exponents of the modern short story, but a man who knows his countryside with a lover's intimacy. *Country Life*, a selection from his weekly notes in *The Spectator*, ranges absorbingly over a diversity of rural topics. It is packed with minute observation of flowers, trees, animals and birds; the thrush who laid eggs in the handle of a disused muck-fork, the fighting robins, and the triangle of courting black-birds are amusing characters. We learn facts and figures about farm labour and crops, village government, and various aspects of the countryside at-war—and echo the never-too-often-repeated heart-cry for decent housing conditions. Ancient customs fast dying out, like Plough Monday, Mop, and Lowbelling, are described. There are practical tips, too: on gardening, and the best wood to burn for a log fire, and recipes for such intriguing dishes as "wigs," "frumenty"—for elucidation the book must be read—and roast swan stuffed with chestnuts. In the fine-etched descriptions of woods and fields in all seasons, it is a keenly sensitive eye which sees the celandines "sun-vernished," or mauve violets "like so many pale suspended moths." This is a book for every country-lover's pocket or bedside dipping.

MARGARET WILLY.

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