

**THE SLIPPERY SLOPE,
AND OTHER PAPERS
ON SOCIAL SUBJECTS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649155002

The slippery slope, and other papers on social subjects by William Amias Bailward

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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WILLIAM AMIAS BAILWARD

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ON SOCIAL SUBJECTS**

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London Stereoscopic Co., 106 Regent St.

WILLIAM AMIAS BAILWARD.

[Frontispiece.]

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ON SOCIAL SUBJECTS

BY THE LATE
WILLIAM AMIAS BAILWARD, M.A.

"I am not at all disturbed at the prospect
of the slippery slope."

—The Rt. Hon. H. H. ASQUITH.
Hansard.

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W

1920

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INTRODUCTION

THESE papers were selected for publication by Mr Bailward shortly before the War; therefore in giving them to the public his friends feel that they are fulfilling his wishes. It may seem to some readers that as the Parliamentary Bills which are the subject of his keen criticism have most of them become Acts, it is of no use to cry over spilt milk. It must, however, be remembered that because an ill-advised measure becomes law it is not thereby endued with wisdom; and if, as has happened in the case of many of these Acts, criticism has unfortunately been proved by experience to be well-founded, it may act as a warning. It may not only prevent further mischief, but show the path of amendment.

Two things, at least, stand out prominently in these papers. The first is the remarkable lucidity of the writer's style. Mr Bailward was a master of English, and he was therefore able to say what he wished with ease and humour. Hence, though he deals with subjects which are too often considered uninteresting by the general public, they are handled with such lightness and even brilliancy of touch that there is hardly a dull line in the book.

The author is careful to point out that his writings are not intended to convert Socialists who have made up their minds and who have a settled policy; but to warn those who may still

be hesitating on the edge of the "slippery slope." There must be many men and women who have neither time, inclination, nor opportunity for studying the difficult problems of Social Science; but who listen readily to those who recommend the downhill path, partly because it appears to be the easier and follows the line of least resistance, but partly also because they do not want to be thought retrograde or out-of-date: they do not care to be treated with the pitying contempt of which the reformer who professes to disbelieve in the Laws of Political Economy has so large a stock-in-trade. To these such a paper as the one entitled "Social Study on Large Maps" would show clearly that the problems of to-day were those of hundreds and even thousands of years ago; that the remedies applied to social ills in ancient Greece and Rome failed, as they will do to-day, if the weakness and strength of human nature are alike disregarded by those who desire them.

Another characteristic of the author is his extreme fairness to his opponents. He invariably states the communistic view in the strongest possible way and presents the arguments against his own position with scrupulous care. He seems at times indeed to be forgetful or unconscious of the fact that he has already demolished them by invincible commonsense and the pitiless logic of facts.

The conclusions at which Mr Bailward arrives are based on a profound study of human nature, and a firm belief in the teaching of history and especially in the History of the Poor Law. It is a fashion of the present day to relegate the teaching and experience of the past, when they happen to be inconvenient, to a kind of "dump," regardless of the fact that the lessons were learnt at painful cost by our forefathers and that they burnt

their fingers severely in the process. "Dumps," as recent experience shows, have a disagreeable habit of exploding with sad results to individuals—the explosion of this social "dump" would mean disaster to the nation.

Mr Bailward was something of a prophet in the true meaning of the word, but not one who prophesied the smooth things to which the un-instructed public so readily listens. Such a paper as the "Psychology of Pauperism" is a short but careful study of what the consequences may be of pandering to the weaker side of human nature. There is an easy-going temper abroad which coolly takes it for granted that although certain results undoubtedly followed certain foolish deeds in past times, they are not likely to follow similar acts of folly now. If the question is asked, "why not?" the answer usually amounts to this: human nature has materially changed for the better. For this pleasant and comfortable assumption there is absolutely no warrant; on the contrary, the history of the past six years gives ample proof that un-disciplined human nature in every class of life can be as idle, self-indulgent and cruel as it ever was.

The History of the English Poor Law may be dull, though there may be two opinions as to that. Modern Schools of Economics may relegate it to the rubbish heap—Professors may bury their learned heads in the sand and encourage their pupils to study the principles of Bolshevism, as the only things worth studying at the moment. But in spite of the contempt of the Schools, Poor Law History will repeat itself unless its lessons are heeded; and the warnings of unpopular but fearless prophets are even now being fulfilled. Must the procession of disastrous failures in Social experiment stretch out to the crack of doom?

All this does not mean that no reforms are