

**THE PLAN OF A
SOCIAL
UNIVERSITY**

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The Plan of a Social University by Morrison I. Swift

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MORRISON I. SWIFT

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SOCIAL UNIVERSITY MONOGRAPHS.

I.

THE PLAN

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BY

Swift

MORRISON I. SWIFT.

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The Plan of a Social University.

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Two or three years ago Mr. S. Burns Weston thought of an experiment among the Philadelphia working people like that of the London People's Palace and the New York Social Settlement, or Neighborhood Guild. His energy and insight, joined with the experience of Mrs. Eliza S. Turner, brought the plan to realization. An association of people contributing yearly five dollars each, was formed, and a Board of Managers appointed to represent the association and carry the ideas into practical execution. The idea took, and funds came in. A house was rented. The history of the undertaking, particularly in the later stages of its development, during the writer's connection with it, is contained in a series of letters and other publications. The first of these appeared in the New York *Neighborhood Guild Journal*, from which I quote :

"Since April, 1888, the Philadelphia Guild has had a three-story house at the corner of Twenty-second and Vine Streets, to which the people of its neighborhood were free to come evenings, on the payment of a yearly moderate fee. During last year there were classes in 'dressmaking, sewing, singing, manual training, carpentry, dancing, cooking, reading, kindergarten and kitchen gardening,' and the work was pursued with interest. Manual training was a notable success. The great advantages of membership in the Guild are 'a library, reading room (with magazines, weekly and daily papers), rooms for games, music and classes, accommodations for business and social meetings, etc.' Besides tickets for single persons, we have family tickets, which admit the father and mother and all children under seventeen.

"One of the principles of this Guild is co-pleasure and co-education. The young men and young women are not separated in clubs for each sex, but have a single club to which all the members belong. This club has just been formed, and the debate next Monday evening is on the subject, 'Is the Stage Degrading?' Those of both sexes also attend classes together. One evening a week, Saturday, is devoted to dancing. Friday evening is to be gymnasium night. Dr. Ladd, the Professor of Physical Culture at Bryn Mawr College, has consented to train the young women from 8 to 9 o'clock for a series of evenings, and from 9 to 10 the young men will be trained by a competent gymnast of the city. A plan is on foot to have the young ladies especially interested in physical training go out to Bryn Mawr some evening to visit the gymnasium there, and see some of the Bryn Mawr students in training."

The present form of the institution is recent, dating from about the beginning of 1890. In a letter to the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* for February 10th, its progress and purposes were thus outlined :

" THE EXPANSION OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD GUILD.

" It is not a fiction that very few, if any, sons of the city wage class go to college. The reason is that they are, from childhood, busy making their living. If they are to have higher education the college must go to them, and in a form suited to the time restrictions and divisions of their lives. They work during the day, and their leisure is evening leisure. The first condition, therefore, of a Social University is that it shall be an evening university.

" The second consideration is that it shall be truly *social*. Learning is a very attractive thing in the hands of those who do not subordinate life to it. Now the manually laboring classes cannot possibly subordinate life to it, for they have not time. Therefore must it be ever borne in mind by the friends of the new industrial culture that the appetite for pleasure, for social intercourse, for an emotional life, is as intrinsically human as the instinct for knowledge, and deeper and more original, and that, where the best hours and energy of each day are consumed before the intellectual life begins, some superfluities of the established curriculum must be skipped.

" It has occurred to some that the Philadelphia Neighborhood Guild offers the foundation for a social university. Educated and college-bred people have begun to cluster about it. There are now fifteen or more persons associated with it in various ways and doing broad educational work. The number steadily grows.

" The work that is now being attempted may be outlined as follows :

Monday evening is the general club meeting of all the members of the Guild (young men and women), when business is transacted, and debates and other literary exercises are engaged in.

" Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings are set aside for classes, group meetings, lectures, guild entertainments and special young women's meetings. Without trying to give a complete list there are classes and groups in history, the American Constitution, science, English, short-hand, sewing, a conversation and reading group, and lectures on social economy.

" On Friday evening the young women's gymnasium drill occurs, and the newly-formed Glee Club meets.

" Saturday evening is devoted to social intercourse and dancing.

" A number of persons render assistance that is less specific than the above, but very important. For an hour or two in the afternoon young children come to the house, and several helpers teach them games and songs.

WHAT IS PROPOSED.

" Other lines of work are soon to be opened. A weekly class in mechanical drawing is projected, a group for physiological instruction, a series of lectures to the young women on science, a course of six public evening lectures on political economy after the university extension plan, a cooking class and instruction in manual training. A series of six Sunday afternoon lectures by prominent men and women of the city is also being arranged, to begin probably in March, and in this enterprise members of the University faculty and

others are co-operating. In the development of the Social University idea students now or formerly connected with Bryn Mawr College are lending aid. A business man has just volunteered to organize a Guild Savings Bank, for which a number of the members have expressed a desire. The first number of a Review will probably be issued in March, when the aims and possibilities of the work will be defined. I believe it may be already announced that the man has been found to take entire charge of the advertising department, which will more than pay the expenses of the publication.

"These hints of the enterprise suffice for the present, and now what encouragement have we from the people for whom the institution is immediately founded? Our members range in age from fifteen years to perhaps twenty-five. Some are passive to opportunities for improvement and do not see how knowledge will increase their income; others have a particular fondness for pleasure and are therefore reluctant to take an evening or two a week for serious purposes; but others still, and I am happy to say their number grows, are anxious to enter every avenue of development that is opened to them, and to contribute their efforts to make the incipient University a certainty and success.

"We, therefore, begin to feel justified in looking to the general public for interest. The Guild is located at 2134 Vine Street, and visitors are welcome on any week-day evening. Taking a single evening, I question if those most educated by coming are not the visitors themselves. One of the more recent acquisitions to the faculty of workers, a graduate student of the University, said this: 'I feel like thanking you for inviting me to come and work here; my ideas have greatly changed in this one evening.'

"It happens, indeed, that everybody is ready for an institution such as the many Guild co-operators are building; everybody wishes that some such thing might be made to exist, and when they find it already here and breathing, they become its supporters, coming individually to work or suggesting acquaintances. We now wish to spread this knowledge more widely, so as to multiply our friends.

"The institution is not a charity, unless the University of Pennsylvania, Bryn Mawr, Haverford and Swarthmore are charities. It is a philanthropy just as these are philanthropies, the members of all five paying some fraction of the expense that is incurred for them, nor, because it is only a fraction, do any make them ashamed or afraid."

Later in February the plan of University Extension Lectures was introduced by a course of six lectures on Social Economy, the subjects being: (1) "Profit-Sharing," (2) "The Eight-Hour Day," (3) "The Organization of Labor," (4) "A Social University," (5) "Is there a Science of Human Progress?" (6) "The Political Economy of Jesus." The object of the course was set forth in the circular announcing the lectures:

"University Extension represents an important phase of the English system of higher education. Under this name lecture courses are given at various local centres, in towns and cities, by trained specialists from the universities, and advanced education is thereby brought within reach of all classes of people.

"It is time to extend the work of our own institutions of learning,

and in Philadelphia the way has already been prepared by the Neighborhood Guild. Among the members of the Guild there are a number eager for opportunities of progressive culture, and who have responded cordially to all efforts made by the Guild workers to enlarge the educational facilities of the institution. In the neighborhood there is a large population from which a part of the general audiences will be drawn, and, it is hoped, many systematic students; but the lectures are not for a single neighborhood only, and persons from any part of the city will be cordially welcomed.

"A central institution for social life and higher learning is needed by all members of society, of whatever class, who toil for a living—whether with hand or brain. In this place the brightest men and women of the city, of all ages, should be associated; and such association would lead to a new culture and a form of society less wasteful of energy and material resources.

"On the foundation of the Neighborhood Guild a Social University is about to be developed, having these larger ends of social union and cultivation in view. This University will give its own certificates of scholarship and confer its own degrees. It will make scholarship congenial. The purpose of the present course of lectures is to lead the way to an American adaptation of the University Extension plan, suiting it to a *regime* of education from which, so far as possible, the ingrained and acknowledged defects of our present institutions shall be rigorously excluded."

A series of Sunday afternoon lectures and concerts was also begun, and Prof. Roland P. Falkner, of the University of Pennsylvania, broke the ground for this course with "A Talk on Germany." The circular issued to the public read:

"This is the first of a series of Sunday Afternoon Lectures and Concerts to be given at the Neighborhood Guild Hall. Although the Guild Hall on Vine Street will not accommodate many persons, the New Assembly Room at Spring Garden and Fifteenth Streets will seat from 300 to 400 people, and after February the lectures will be there. Thus far the Guild has furnished pleasure and education to young men and women mainly. These lectures are for older persons as well, and are designed to offer Sunday afternoon recreation and instruction for men and women with families, as also for the young. We invite the parents of our members. There are, besides, many who do not know what the Guild is doing, and these Sunday entertainments will give them an opportunity to obtain an idea of the importance and usefulness of the Guild, and lead them to

co-operate with it in the work of social improvement, education and progress."

The *New York Guild Journal* for the same month contained further statements regarding the Social University idea, in an article entitled "The Plan of a Social University."

"When I say to people 'the working classes need a Social University,' they reply 'so do the rich.' Their argument is invincible, and in time the rich shall have one, but let us begin with those who have not a certain other kind of university, what to call it I hardly know.

"A Social University shall recognize that a man can feel as well as think, that he has a body the proper function of which is action, that bread is made and deserved by labor, that knowledge is not an end in itself.

"It shall recognize furthermore, that the many are not made to toil for the few, that the workingman is as good as the industrial king, that his function is as noble, that the return for his labor shall be sufficient to enable him to develop and be happy with the best, and that if this requires a mighty curtailment of the powers and profits of those who manage capital—and so it does—the curtailment must surely and unflinchingly be made.

"The beginnings of a Social University already exist in Philadelphia. Adopting the *group system*, graduates of Bryn Mawr, the University of Pennsylvania and other institutions, are undertaking the work of progressive education, with the members of the Family Guild.

"There is none of the perfunctory anachronistic relation of professor or teacher to pupil in this relation. If the group leader cannot humanly interest and inspire, he or she is a failure.

"Gradually a Faculty of leaders will be formed, and then a Board of Assistants; and the latter will be from the members of the Guild itself, chosen by the Faculty, and chosen because of the attentiveness and efficiency they show in the Guild work.

"One of our immediate projects is a course of Sunday afternoon lectures by University people and others. Those who could assist in the execution of this plan have responded cordially and often with enthusiasm, when it has been broached to them. Doubtless musicales will be interspersed.

"After a time, perhaps before this is published, more systematic lecturing will be instituted on one or two of the evenings of the