

# **SOCIAL REFORM AND THE CHURCH**

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Social reform and the Church by John R. Commons

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**JOHN R. COMMONS**

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AND THE CHURCH**



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# SOCIAL REFORM

AND

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BY  
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WITH

AN INTRODUCTION

BY

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## CONTENTS.

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	PAGE.
INTRODUCTION, BY PROF. RICHARD T. ELY . . . . .	v
PREFACE, BY THE AUTHOR . . . . .	ix
THE CHRISTIAN MINISTER AND SOCIOLOGY . . . . .	3
THE CHURCH AND THE PROBLEM OF POVERTY . . . . .	29
THE EDUCATED MAN IN POLITICS . . . . .	51
THE CHURCH AND POLITICAL REFORMS . . . . .	71
TEMPERANCE REFORM . . . . .	99
MUNICIPAL MONOPOLIES . . . . .	123
PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION . . . . .	155

## INTRODUCTION.

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It is but a few months since PROFESSOR COMMONS gave us an important contribution to economic theory in his "Distribution of Wealth," a work which, in my opinion, is destined to exercise a decided influence upon the development of economic thought. The present work fitly supplements the earlier volume in several directions. It is more popular in character, and is calculated to exercise a more immediate influence upon practical affairs.

The character of the topics discussed in this volume is significant, because political reforms, as well as social reforms, are urged from an economic standpoint. ADAM SMITH said long ago, if a rod is bent too much in one direction, to make it straight we must

bend it as much in the other; and this saying illustrates the attitude of social reformers towards politics. Earlier in the century there was a tendency to give undue importance to mere political reforms. The Chartists in England directed their attention to political reforms, and many of them seemed to think that these alone would improve the condition of the masses. The Christian Socialism of Maurice, Kingsley, and others in the middle of the century was, to some extent at least, a protest against the exaggeration of political measures.

Since that day, the interest in politics on the part of the advocates of economic reforms has greatly diminished, because it has been perceived that politics is concerned with the outward form and not directly with the substance of things. The interesting questions of the day, so far as they have taken hold of the masses of mankind, have been socio-economic questions, not political questions. The rod has been bent too much, perhaps, in the other direction; and now we may hope that



it is becoming straight, since a comprehensive treatment of the social problems of the day shows that we require improvement in political conditions, in order to supply us with a better political machinery for carrying out various purposes with respect to the amelioration of social conditions.

Civil service reform is an administrative measure which has popular economic bearings not sufficiently considered heretofore, because the larger aspects of civil service reform have been neglected by those who have been most prominent as its advocates. But we begin to hear much of direct legislation by the people as seen in the use of two Swiss institutions, the Initiative and the Referendum. Still another political measure with important economic bearings is proportional representation, which is so excellently treated by Professor Commons.

Next in importance to the direct instruction and information conveyed by these essays, is the significance which they have on account of the fact, already mentioned, that they unite

political and economic reforms, looking at the former from the standpoint of the latter.

It gives me much pleasure to welcome this work and to commend it. Opinions may differ in regard to the views presented in this work, as well as in Professor Commons's "Distribution of Wealth;" but there can be no doubt that they both afford an excellent stimulus to popular thought, and that they are calculated to awaken men to the true importance of popular questions of the day, and to help get us out of the ruts into which we are so likely to fall. It is a time when we need vigorous thinking, clear thinking, and a right spirit; and all these are found in the works of Professor Commons.

RICHARD T. ELY.

## PREFACE.

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THE following essays, except the last one, were read originally before audiences distinctively Christian. Some of them appeared subsequently in print. "The Christian Minister and Sociology" was published as a leaflet by the Christian Social Union in the United States. "The Church and the Problem of Poverty" appeared in the *Charities Review* of June, 1893. "The Educated Man in Politics" was published by the *Indiana Student*, a monthly periodical conducted by the students of Indiana University. The essays on "The Church and Political Reforms," and "Temperance Reform," were read before a sectional conference of the Evangelical Alliance at Chicago, and will probably appear in the published proceedings of that meeting. The