

CONTRIBUTISM*

OF social panaceas there is no end, and after G. K. C.'s *Distributism* comes Mr. J. R. Bellerby's *Contributism*. As the author of *A Contributive Society* promises us a criticism of the idea contained in that book during the present year, it would seem unfair for a mere layman in the economic world to enter the lists of criticism before the appearance of that second work. But it may be shrewdly suspected that it is only the latter part of the book, containing the reconstructive ideas, which will be submitted to this self criticism, and an examination of the premises on which the scheme of social reconstruction is based may not come amiss. In any case, the critical volume may be anticipated with unmixed feelings, for how rarely do authors develop into critics of themselves.

Mr. Bellerby's description of what he is pleased to call the 'economic system' gives the impression that he has been shown round by someone who regards that system with complacency. It has weak points, he admits, but it is a good machine which only requires better oiling and one or two minor replacements to function perfectly.

Throughout his analysis of what he calls the economic system (although many of us are inclined to regard it as the economic *scramble*), he makes use of terms which, like the words used by Humpty-Dumpty in *Alice in Wonderland*, mean just what he intends them to mean. He speaks of 'goods' not 'commodities'—a vital distinction. Ruskin was wiser when he spoke of the production of *wealth* and of *illth*. He does not seem to realise that labour power is a commodity, but he follows in the footsteps of Marx in

*A CONTRIBUTIVE SOCIETY. By J. R. Bellerby. (Education Services, 28 Commercial Street, London, E.C.1.)

Blackfriars

recognising the class war, which he calls 'the employment of one group by another.'

Again, dealing with money, he cannot envisage the existence of an economic system deprived of the use of money as a medium of exchange. Money, to him, is a check on waste and extravagance. We may all use communal roads without being provided with tokens authorising us to make use of this socially-owned service an unrestricted number of times, but this could not be applied to railways or water supply or gas. We should abuse our freedom. Therefore, the money system must be perpetuated. Yet the Merrie England of William Morris had no use for money, and Sir Thomas More devoted gold to the basest uses.

Mr. Bellerby emphasises the importance of the human factor. But in this he shows no originality. Human nature does not change. Education may modify it, but the incentive of gain is the base of man's economic conduct. His psychological comments sometimes take one's breath away. One or two will bear quotation. He says :

Sometimes 'acquired' self-interest underlies the fear of losing employment. We are induced to strive because inefficiency may mean dismissal, and then, the raised eyebrows of friends. It is the faint scorn of neighbours that is the real dread of the unemployed.

Each day the newspapers record cases of suicide of men rendered desperate by unemployment. Not hunger, not the spectacle of wives and children deprived of necessary food and clothing, but the 'faint scorn of neighbours is the real dread of the unemployed.' Very obviously, Mr. Bellerby has never been out of work.

One more quotation of naive economic psychology. After emphasising that self-interest is the motive of economic conduct, he says that the prodigious strength

and life of industry 'is due at least in part to one more motive: that of the urge to add. Few seem to know with sureness from what this springs, least of all those who possess it. It is strangely present: and its power is fierce.'

Again the daily newspapers supply, however dubiously, the secret of this urge, in their almost daily list of bankruptcies. No matter how rich a man is, he is never secure. He heapeth up riches, but he cannot tell who shall gather them.

'In order to produce any marked effect upon the economic system,' says Mr. Bellerby, 'the line of approach must be: first, to work out in detail the nature of the new system desired; secondly, to decide what qualities in human personality would be needed to ensure the effective operation of the system; and thirdly, to institute a widespread campaign of education to produce these qualities.'

The latter half of the book deals with how this should be done. A Rotarianism of universal application will give us all the watchword of service. Our schools will all work on the principles of Sanderson of Oundle. The community will be our God and we will serve him, knowing that in serving him we shall be serving ourselves, for are we not the community! Our aim will be to contribute all we can to the common stock, taking from it, at the same time, all we can, for consumption stimulates production.

Alas! factories and shops are overflowing with food and boots and blankets and clothes, and millions are in need of the common necessities of life. Production was never more efficient than it is to-day, but distribution remains still inefficient. It is the problem of distribution that is puzzling the minds of the politicians and economists of to-day. Wealth is piled up, but it cannot be distributed. The producers of the

Blackfriars

wealth cannot buy the wealth they have themselves created. The economic 'system' protected by the 'laws of property' prevent this. Contributism scarcely solves the riddle.

Mr. Bellerby's book is a book to place in the hands of a study circle, W.E.A. class, or I.L.P. Guild of Youth. It would provide them, on every one of its pages, with debatable matter, and show them that there are still people in this world who can look upon the life around them with equanimity.

C. P. LE HURAY.

POST CRUCIFIXIONEM

ALL things stood in wild confusion—
The days of Mary came and went
In retreat, in seclusion.
At the heart of the confusion
Came and went—
Came and went
Those still days of close retreat.

H.S.

+++ etc.
And in their wake
Came — nor went;
Not ever went,
The peace of Mary — heaven sent.