

Book Review

" Voluntary Action "

by WILLIAM BEVERIDGE

ALLEN AND UNWIN; 16 Shillings

Reviewed by Aruna Mukerji

LOMD Beveridge's recent study on this subject is a timely publication which reviews what has been done in Britain by voluntary servers, and is of much interest to us in India-

It supplements his two previous studies which dealt with social service by State action. His report on "Social Insurance and Allied Subjects", published in 1942, has already created history and has rightly been described by G. D. H. Cole as "one of the great social documents of our time". Its thesis that it is the duty of the State to ensure social security for its citizens, by undertaking a comprehensive scheme of social insurance, is now widely accepted and is being implemented, at least in part, by many countries. Beveridge's second report on "Full Employment in a Free Society", however, raised issues which are more controversial.

The term "voluntary worker" used to signify at one time one who was unpaid and worked for some good cause, but the term has come to acquire quite a different connotation. The voluntary worker is now-a-days a highly trained and often a fairly well-paid professional worker, who works for a "voluntary organisation", i.e., one which is "initiated and governed by its own members without external control."

The motive behind voluntary organisations for social services was the need to improve the conditions of the poor and under-privileged. With the progress of in-

dustrialisation, the scope of voluntary action changed. At first it was concerned with the reform of prisons, lunatic asylums, and the care of the sick and homeless. The central problem was that of poverty. Industrialisation brought new problems such as overcrowding in towns, long hours, and unhealthy working conditions in factories.

Voluntary action has been responsible for some of the outstanding institutions of British life. Such organisations have developed on two lines—mutual aid and philanthropy and it is under these two headings that Beveridge discusses them.

Under mutual aid societies are listed Friendly Societies, Trade Unions, Building Societies, Housing Societies, Consumers' Co-operatives, Trustee Savings Banks, etc.

Friendly Societies were concerned with the welfare of their members and were the "democratic pioneers of mutual insurance".

Trade Unions, which began as associations to secure fair wages and conditions of work for their workers, have now become "possibly strong enough to challenge the State, certainly in a position to influence and deflect its action".

"Building Societies do not build; they simply make advances on building," while Consumers' Co-operatives, which started with the Rochdale Movement of 1844, provide cash dividends to those who buy at the co-operative stores.

Under "Philanthropic, Motive in Action" are listed Social Surveys and Residential Settlements — both the direct result of industrialisation. Women's Youth Organisations also come under this classification. Social Surveys are impartial studies of social conditions and problems. Residential settlements aim at bringing together young, well-to-do people to live among the poor not only to carry on social work but to gain first-hand experience of their problems. Each of them has proved its worth by leading to the exposure of many social evils. Youth organisations, Beveridge holds, should teach its members how to be useful citizens, and should never become a part of the State, as in Nazi Germany.

There is an absorbing chapter in this book on the pioneers of social service, many of whom have founded institutions of lasting worth. They range from the aristocratic Shaftesbury who tried to improve the conditions of the working classes by Parliamentary legislation to Elizabeth Fry, the Quaker prison reformer; from Quentin Hogg, the founder of polytechnic schools to Dr. Barnado, the founder of homes for orphaned children. Without their selfless devotion to the cause which they made their own, how much poorer the world would have been!

Britain is now described as the positive or social service State in contrast to the *laissez-faire* State. In other words, the State recognises that it is its duty to promote the welfare of its citizens by securing for them a basic minimum standard of life. The putting into practice of this doctrine can be seen in the setting up of the National Health Insurance Service, and National Insurance Acts by the present Labour Government.

What, asks Beveridge, is the future of voluntary service in a

social service State? He thinks that, in England, the future of voluntary action will lie in "exploring new avenues of social service when want is abolished". Voluntary action is needed to meet the growing leisure of wage earners.

"The last stage in totalitarianism would be reached if the use of his leisure was being arranged for each citizen by the State."

Some constructive suggestions are made regarding the future scope of voluntary action the provision of homes for old people, or of recuperative centres for mothers and children. These suggestions can be followed with much profit in India.

"Voluntary action is one of the marks of a free society", says Beveridge.

A. D. Lindsay in a recent book on Voluntary Social Services (Edited by A. F. C. Bourdillon) advances a similar view. Democracy, he holds, depends on encouraging newness and invention, and here actions play a vital part. They provide training in democracy, and are the centres of public opinion. In Great Britain, voluntary services will be concerned with "positive inventiveness" (i.e., catering to new wants) and not with problems of poverty.

The value of this book for us in India is that it points out the vast field which is open to social workers, and it shows that in many cases the State has followed paths first explored by voluntary action. Many of the social evils, which we wish to eradicate, will have first to be attacked by voluntary action also.

We may sum up by saying with Beveridge that "the making of good society depends not on the State but on citizens acting individually or in free association with one another."

Cotton Market

Abundant Global Supplies

ACCORDING to the International Cotton Advisory Committee, the global production of raw cotton in 1948-49 was 28.7 million bales, against 25.1 million bales in 1947-48. This indicated an increase of 3.6 million bales or of over 14 per cent. Global consumption, however, trended downwards and totalled 27.7 million bales in 1948-49, compared with 28.7 million bales in 1947-49, and showing a fall of one million bales. Resultantly, the global carry-over of cotton as on August 1, 1949 is estimated at 15.1 million bales, compared with 14.1 million bales at the end of the previous season, which shows an increase of 1 million bales.

Cotton is expected to be in still more abundant supply in the new season, 1949-50, states the International Advisory Committee. It points out, however, that consumption is likely to continue downward because of the downturn in industrial and trading activity in the important economic centres of the world.

In America, the Department of Agriculture will be releasing its production estimates next week. On the basis of the existing condition of the crop an output of over 15 million bales is expected. This will mean an over-abundant supply of American cotton. The more so, because world consumption of American cotton has been rapidly declining. In U.S.A. itself, the rate of domestic mill consumption is showing signs of a nasty fall, despite the present temporary revival of the piece-goods market. The rest of the world appears to be determined to conserve its dollar resources and hence domestic cotton consumption in U.S.A. is expected to

be in line rather with the internal demand for textiles than with world demand. The new crop of over 15 million bales is likely to add considerably to the already burdensome supplies which the U.S. Government have been compelled to own via the cotton loan machinery.

The prospect of increased unsold supplies of cotton throughout the world have induced the U.S. Government to forge such means as would eliminate the prospect of an equally big crop being raised in 1950-51. The House Agricultural Committee has unanimously approved the legislation authorising the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to limit 1959 cotton planting to 21 million acres as against the 1949 acreage of 26.3 million acres.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has announced price supports for the 1949 crop. These range from 4.3 per cent to 5.4 per cent, lower than last year's. The average loan rate for 7/8" middling upland cotton harvested in 1949, for instance, would be 27.23 cents per lb. and the loan rate for 15/16" middling cotton will average about 24.43 cents per lb., compared with 28.79 cents and 29.54 cents respectively in 1948.

The U.S. market eased somewhat this week partly as a result of the unexpected 12-point drop in the mid-July parity price and partly owing to the fact that the new crop deliveries were selling a little above the 1949 loan rate of 23.43 cents. With the publication of the U.S. Bureau Report on crop production next week, the market is soon expected to adjust itself to the new supply situation.

Pakistan is also slowly becoming