

CHAPTER III.

Injustice and Evolution.

Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns.

—Tennyson, "Locksley Hall."

How are we to account historically for the prevalence of injustice in our industrial system and for our blindness to it? The simplest way is, I think (without dogmatizing and merely as a working theory), to suppose that a great purpose underlies the history of civilization, in the carrying out of which it was necessary to use men as pawns. The secret of civilization is co-operation. It was essential to make men work together for the accomplishment of vast undertakings; and, in order that they might apply their labor most effectively, it was indispensable that each should do that for which he was best fitted, and conversely to fit himself for that special work which he would be called upon to do. Hence the division of labor, which exists only in embryo among savages. At the same time the submission of large numbers of people to one general design had to be secured. Now how was this to be done? The most obvious method among nations totally unschooled in co-operation was that of slavery, and this is the method which civilization adopted. It is a simple plan. I own a thousand of my fellow-beings, and I have some great work which I wish to accomplish. Consequently, by my command and by the lash I make my slaves perform the task. It is a most efficient system, and under it the great civilizations of the ancient world sprang up and flourished. The pyramids, the

temples of the Nile and of Asia testify to its triumphs. The art and culture of Thebes and Memphis, of Babylon and Nineveh, of Athens and Rome, rested upon slavery and would have been impossible without it. Of course, we see today that slavery involved terrible injustice—that in fact it was based on injustice. But it was essential to the progress of civilization that the ancients should not see this, and their eyes were holden. Their most enlightened thinkers, such as Plato and Aristotle, when they tried to create a Utopia in their minds, could hardly imagine a society without slaves; and St. Paul, with all the principles of Christian ethics fresh in his memory, accepted slavery without question.

New ideas, subversive of existing institutions, are quietly dropped into the minds of men like seeds, and they often grow into great trees that hide the heavens before men awake to their true import. Love of neighbor—the Golden Rule—are inconsistent with slavery and for centuries they have quietly been doing their work of liberation as economic conditions have permitted or assisted. Slavery was not abolished, it was outgrown. The world passed through the period of feudalism, which was a kind of masked slavery, the ownership of the slave or serf being inherent in the ownership of the soil, and at last grew into the system under which we are living today, the wage system, differing perhaps more in appearance than in fact from the original chattel slavery from which it was evolved.

The essence of the wage system is this: I have got a great mass of things—and that word “things” usually includes a good deal of land—and these things other people wish to get. There are a thousand men, for instance, who stand in need of them. I say: “You cannot have them. It is true that I cannot use them, but you shall not be allowed to touch them unless you come and do this piece of work for me.” The result which I accomplish is precisely that which was accomplished under the system of slavery. These thou-

sand people come together and carry out my designs, for the privilege of getting a share of the things which I have accumulated. This is the wage system. And it is noticeable that it requires a superior type of workman in order to be effective. A slave requires no motive power but fear; while a wage-worker must have wants, and unless these wants go beyond the merest subsistence, he will not be a very efficient worker, for it will require but little work to enable him to satisfy his primitive needs.

We see an interesting example in South Africa of the necessity of stimulating wants among savage peoples, if they are to be made to co-operate in great undertakings without recourse to actual slavery. Earl Grey, himself one of the foremost promoters of co-operation in England, while addressing the directors of the South African Mining Company, said that "means had to be found to induce the natives to seek spontaneously employment in the mines, and to work willingly for long terms of more or less continuous service.* In time he believed the education of the natives would cause them to seek work to gratify those growing wants which were the certain results of increased contact with civilization. Meanwhile an incentive to labor must be provided by the imposition of a hut-tax of at least one pound per year, in conformity with the practice in Basutoland, and also by the establishment of a small labor tax which those able-bodied natives should be required to pay who were unable to show a certificate of four months' work."

This device differs very little from chattel slavery. A tax is imposed on people who are unwilling to work. There is no way to get money with which to pay the tax except by working in the mines. The natives come to work in the mines to satisfy this artificial want of money with which to pay the tax. And this by euphemism is called free, voluntary and spontaneous labor! I am

*This use of the words "spontaneously" and "willingly" is perhaps a little unusual.

not speaking of the morality of such a policy, but I cite it to prove that if civilization is to supplant savagery, it can only be brought about by slavery or by stimulating the wants of the people, human nature being what it has always been.

The lot of a wage-worker is undoubtedly preferable to that of a slave, but there are points of resemblance between them, and there are some advantages on the side of the slave. Under slavery there is never any question of the unemployed, and no one ever seeks work without finding it. It is the master's interest to keep his slave in good health. The wage-earner is free to starve or to commit suicide, but the slave was not, for his master had a stake in his life and strength. A good slave was worth a thousand dollars, but a good wage-earner is worth nothing at all, for you can pick up another on the next corner. Perhaps the greatest advantage which the wage-worker possesses over the slave is that he thinks that he is free, and freedom is such a quickener and vivifier that the mere belief that you have it is a tonic in itself.

And if slavery had some advantages for the slave, it had also some disadvantages for the master. It was a crude affair. The slaves were driven to work and had to be watched every moment, as they had no incentive to labor but the whip. It was necessary to buy them at high prices, and take care of them when they were ill, and bury them when they were dead. The whole system was an unbusinesslike proposition which no financier of today would tolerate for an instant. We talk of freeing the slaves, but it was really freeing the masters. "A free workman," cut off from his base of supplies, while all the resources of nature are in the hands of a few, must make a slave of himself in order to get a living. No one would think of buying him nowadays, nor of paying his doctor's or undertaker's bills. The masters used to bid for the slave at the auction block, but now the workmen bid for the job. But nevertheless on the whole we must admit that the wage-earner's

lot is the more desirable of the two, for at least he is called free, and that is something in itself.

There are not wanting signs that our industrial system is about to undergo a change similar to that which displaced slavery. Everywhere there are indications of increasing friction. Vast modifications are being effected in our financial arrangements and the equilibrium of centuries gives evidence of serious disturbance. This is partly due to the discovery of machinery of all kinds, and partly to the growing conviction that the present system is unjust. The frequent financial crises, and the great number of conflicts between employers and employed, would of themselves indicate the necessity of finding some new *modus vivendi*. The fact that the justice of a system begins to be questioned far and wide seems to be a sort of automatic signal to show that it is doomed, for so long as injustice is necessary to civilization, its nature is carefully concealed from mankind. And while machinery has to a certain degree accentuated the inequality of conditions, it has at the same time supplied the elements which can preserve civilization without that inequality. Slaves may be requisite to civilization, but to-day we have slaves of wood and iron who may supplant those of flesh and blood.

And we may ask incidentally why machinery has not proved to be a greater blessing to men. If we had been living two hundred years ago, and a prophet had told us that after a couple of centuries had elapsed one man would be able on an average to do the work of thirteen (which is, I believe, the fact), what would we have said? Would we not have cried out, "Ah, at last the millenium is coming. We shall then have all the comfort we have now, for one-thirteenth of the labor; and with two or three hours of easy work every day, we shall all live like princes!" And would not such a statement have been reasonable? And ought it not to have turned out to be true? The wealth of the world has indeed increased by

leaps and bounds, but most of it has fallen into the laps of the few.

If the wage-system is doomed, we may well study the transition to it from slavery, in the hope of finding some suggestion throwing some light upon the impending revolution. The abolition of slavery involved a change of incentive from fear to the desire of gain. A servile or a savage population has no desire of gain, and they will not co-operate except as slaves. The desire of gain is for them a virtue to which they have not attained. But we have reached a point at which the desire of gain has ceased to be a virtue, and has become the selfish cause of a great deal of misery. Hence we must change our incentive again and find some new motive for co-operation. What that new motive should be is pretty obvious. We should make things, because the community, including ourselves, needs them. We must have sufficient consideration for the community to wish to supply its wants. We must love our neighbors and ourselves. Slaves make boots because they have to. Wage-earners make boots because they get paid for it. The worker of the future will make boots for the purpose of covering the feet of men. Slaves built the pyramids and temples of Egypt from fear of the lash. Wage-earners build our cities from the desire of money. But the coming craftsmen will erect buildings because they are needed. And incidentally, making things on account of the usefulness of the things themselves, they will find a new pleasure in their work, which will show itself in artistic workmanship. It seems to be so natural and inevitable that things should be made because they are wanted, that it is almost inconceivable that it should require centuries to educate the human race up to this point. And yet such is the case, and we are still far from having learned the lesson. Fear or the wage-lust are yet the necessary spurs to persevering co-operative endeavor. And as we change from one incentive to another, let us remember that it is a mistake to drop the former

before we have attained the latter, for civilization might expire in the interim. Love of money must last until love of work and neighbor is ready to take its place. So long as we are greedy for money the wage-system suits us, and we have as good a civilization as we deserve.

It is encouraging to observe that men are feeling after the new incentive in all directions. The genius of co-operation is in the air. We see it in the combinations of manufacturers in trusts, and in those of workmen in trade-unions. We see it in the numerous co-operative enterprises of England, and in the attempt to form communistic colonies in America. The fact that many of these efforts fail does not prove the fallacy of the instinct, but on the contrary might have been foreseen in the nature of things, for nature moves slowly and after many experiments. Voluntary co-operation must succeed the involuntary and forced co-operation of the past, and fear and greed must give place to the enthusiasm of mutual help. In every department of human activity the note of brotherhood begins to be struck. Science demonstrates our oneness; philosophy corroborates science; and religion tells us more and more the same story. It requires no very great prophetic gifts to predict the advance of the race in that direction—toward the development of an *esprit de corps*—the consciousness that we form a complex body corporate. It will be a long and arduous advance. Slavery lasted two thousand years after its foundations had been undermined. The many experiments which have been made in communistic enterprise tend to show that man is not ready yet to take the decisive step. But none the less we should bend our efforts in that direction. We must practice ourselves and our neighbors in mutual consideration and co-operation, letting pass no opportunity for experiment in this line, feeling sure that, because our eyes have been opened to the evil of injustice and greed, so we have a right to expect to acquire the new motive of love for work on its own account and on account of the

consumer. The slave was always looking backward at the lash behind him. The wage-earner looks forward, indeed, but only at the wages coming back to him. But the ideal workman of the future, the voluntary co-operator, will look, with his eyes to the front, at the work itself, and at the blessing which it is to bring to men, rejoicing in his own activity and in its beneficence. Involuntary co-operation, wrested from want by injustice, must give way to voluntary co-operation, born of common wisdom and honesty. And the transition is taking place, just as might have been foreseen. A few have had their eyes opened to the wrong, and gradually the idea that a change is desirable and necessary is spreading. Meanwhile the economic friction is increasing, and pressing men forward towards radical remedies. That is the order of all historic changes, for man grows out of barbarism by gradually discovering his barbarity.