

CHAPTER III

THE NATURAL ORDER

WE have now covered the whole field of our inquiry. We have found the unequal distribution of wealth, which so distracts public and private life in the Republic, to be due to Government favors to individuals, operating in all instances as if private laws had been made expressly for their benefit. We have seen the Government favors or privileges fall into four general classes: monopolies of natural opportunities, tariff and other taxes on production and its fruits, highway grants, and incorporation powers and immunities. We have seen that the first two of these can be destroyed by shifting the entire weight of taxation from production to land values, that highways should be taken over, and that then would easily follow simplified processes of incorporation and modified judicial practices.

How could proposals so simple cure ills so complex as those that distort or disturb every phase of life in the Republic? It is because such proposals go to the beginnings. A pebble started at a mountain top, and gathering as it goes, may precipitate an avalanche. So starting with equals, a simple power of some to appropriate from the toil of others will at length differentiate society into red heels and sabots; with culture, refinement, graces and self-indulgence on one side, and ignorance, brutishness, uncouthness and want on the other. Some will appear ordained to rule; others, to be ruled. And should the few refuse to relinquish the power of appropriation

that exalts them and depresses the mass, there can be no conclusion but a social cataclysm, in which the primal truth of equal rights will declare itself, even though "clad in hell-fire."

There is a right way for the individual to live and a wrong way. There are natural physical and moral laws which he perceives and which he realizes he must not transgress. The rules for his spiritual peace and happiness are few, simple and obvious.

Are there natural ordinances for the individual and not for society? Is not the coming together of individuals to join their powers the first step in civilization? Are there no natural laws for the governing of men so drawn together? Is not Nature's great, simple, cardinal mandate for social progress that men should associate in a condition of equality — not equality of physical, mental, or spiritual powers, but equality in respect to natural opportunities? Clear and keep clear the way to Nature's bounties and then let individuals alone — that is the supreme canon of civilization. The next rests upon and is subordinate to it, being that as social needs develop, they call for performance of social functions. This is required in order that the principle of equal rights shall not be disturbed, which would occur were such performance made a privilege to be controlled by individuals.

What more is proposed in these pages than a return to the natural order? Those functions that are by their nature public should be performed by the public. Those functions that are by their nature private should be left to private hands, freed of all hindrances and embarrassments. Beneath all, Nature should be liberated from the thralldom now closing up and shutting off bounties she freely offers to all and which all should equally enjoy.

Does this propose anything strange or impossible? Does it in any way conflict with natural justice? Is it not, indeed, the decree of Justice?

The production of wealth would not be less in such a

state of things, but more; while the powers to interfere with its natural and equitable distribution would be destroyed. None would have the means of appropriating what he did not produce. None would have the power to heap together great riches at the expense of the mass. To the producer would go the fruits, and he who would not work should starve, or at least be viewed with disgust and treated with contempt. No longer would the idler, the appropriator of other men's gains, write himself "gentleman" in the marriage certificate; no longer would the owners of Government favor range themselves apart as an aristocracy of privilege. Then gentlemen would be only such as, in Franklin's words, could show themselves "to be useful members of society"; then, in Jefferson's words, "virtue and talents" would constitute a "natural aristocracy . . . the most precious gift of Nature, for the instruction, the trust and the government of society."

For if Nature, which is so copious in her gifts that, as Prince Kropotkin says, no man can tell the possibilities of a foot of earth — if lavish Nature is no longer shut off by the speculator at every turn, but is cast open to the labor of head and hand, whence can come enough men to fully engage her in production? Her demand for men can never cease, and to them she does not exhaust herself, but passes from a lower to a higher use, multiplying her rewards in an infinite progression.

Where all men would be able to get an independent living, who need bow, or cringe, or be afraid? And where would be the necessity for laborers to band together to resist cutting in wages, blacklisting, dismissal for premature old age?

Labor produces more and more as civilization advances; but Privilege, in the person of the monopolist of natural opportunities, the owner of franchise, tariff or similar power, appropriates, leaving to the laborer little more than enough to sustain him in further production. Wages at bottom depend upon what the laborer can earn for him-

self from the best land that is free to him — land that is open to him without the payment of rent. With all restrictions away and Nature calling for men to bring forth her infinite quantity and variety of treasure, and with the powers of labor increasing as the human units more closely cooperate in the body social, wages would not fall or even remain stationary, but would mount. American laborers would then think no more of organizing against "capital," as Privilege is mistakenly called, than they would think of organizing against a race of men whose only records are a few scattered ruins and picture writings engraved on fragments of stone. Strikes and lockouts, sweeping enjoining orders and the glisten of bayonets in industrial affairs would belong to a past and to-be-forgotten age. Great stretches of unused Nature would be calling to labor to come and receive her rich reward, and none by Government writ or social sanction would bar the way.

Labor applied to free conditions would find so ample a reward as to lead sensibly to a shortening of the hours of toil and the development of the mental and moral natures. Prisons and penitentiaries, almshouses and insane asylums would cease to be crowded, and most of them would crumble in disuse: for sin and crime, and disease and helplessness, which are the progeny of involuntary poverty, or of its antithesis, superabundance, would lessen with the change that brought bountiful opportunity to all.

Again the worth of individual manhood would shine forth, and public questions would be the interest and the concern of all. Again would revive the spirit of the town-meeting — "the wisest invention," said Jefferson, "devised by the wit of man for the perfect exercise of self-government and for its preservation." Politics would clear and purify, for where would be the prizes that corruption now wins; who to be corrupted, among a people filled with a new hope? The bondage of the press would cease, the university be freed from the hand of special interest, the pulpit cut away from deadening dependence.

The trend of Government would change from centralized, solidified, one-man power toward democratic, decentralized, federated communities. More surely than the sense and sincerity of the mass of the people would become the guides of progress; and, too strong to fear oppression, the Republic would become too just to oppress.