

CHAPTER XXI.

HAVE ALL WEALTH PRODUCERS AN EQUAL CHANCE?

In several issues of the Sunday News-Tribune something over a year ago, "A Workingman" and "A Banker" carried on a controversy, if it may be called such, as to the chances in life of the average workingman. Unlike some letters that get into the papers, the "workingman" was a genuine wage-worker, the "banker" in business on Griswold street. Neither wrote under false colors, and both were perfectly honest, one believing that there are few chances for workingmen and the other just as sincerely thinking that the human misery seen among the working classes is mainly due to the fact that they do not take up the business chances presented to them. The workingman's contention was:

1. There are millions of men without a decent chance in life.
2. There are hundreds of thousands of children uneducated, or doomed to an unfair chance, if they are educated.

The banker combatted these propositions. He held that there were plenty of chances, and that if workingmen will go to capitalists and show what they can do, the money will be immediately forthcoming, for the experience of the poor man is the fortune of the rich. Then the workingman asks the banker to mention some of these chances, and the banker suggests that he invest his money in copper and other stocks.

And now the workingman retorts, in a letter before me, that "a man that is poor has no money to invest in such chances" as the banker speaks of, which is very true, for the masses are financially below that class.

As each has had his say out, and further discussion would only take the parties over the same ground, it was suggested to me that a lesson might be drawn from the discussion.

Here is a case in which much depends on the point of view. It is absolutely true, as insisted by the "wage-worker," that "there are millions of men without a decent chance in life." It is also true, as held by the "banker," that "there are millions of men with a decent chance in life." But if the workingman had said there were millions of men without a decent chance in life where there are hundreds with, he would have put the banker to rout. The fact that at times some few workmen become well fixed, financially, without being an exploiter, through a happy combination of favorable circumstances, has led many a good man to believe that all could have been equally successful if they had only taken advantage of their opportunities. When the dissolute children of a successful business man can not only have the benefit of their father's millions, but matters are so arranged that they continue to draw from the wealth of the community without making any return, it is self-evident that a great many thousands of people's chances have been taken away. The equilibrium has been destroyed between those who produce wealth and those who enjoy it, and strive he never so hard it is impossible that workers under such a system, except in isolated instances, can be anything else but drudges all their lives. It is as easy for them to fly to the moon as to escape their fate. With them foreordination is a fixed fact—a foreordination to work for the benefit of others. The success of the few is the destruction of the many. It serves as a bait to deter others from insisting on any change in economic conditions, substantially under the false hope that in time their chances may come to get rich without making adequate return in the shape of physical exertion.

It is equally true that "there are hundreds of thousands of children uneducated, or doomed to unfair

chances if they are educated." Yet at times uneducated children rise in the social and financial scale—which terms in this country are synonymous—and become noted men and women. I once had a slight acquaintance with the president of an eastern railroad who was very illiterate. He was great on organization, but he didn't know enough about spelling to pass an examination in the A fifth grade. Originally doomed to unfair chances, he had broken through his environments and left better educated children in the lurch. Accident and opportunity had combined to give him the chance that could come to but few. Had he gone to college it might have spoiled him for the work he fell into. Yet to the great majority of children, to be uneducated is to place a bar across their industrial pathway that will ever prevent them rising above a laborer's condition.

But education is not everything. In fact, under present industrial conditions, if all were equally well educated, there would still be millionaires on one hand and degrading poverty on the other, unless the education of the poor was used to change industrial conditions. Leave the system alone and it is impossible to prevent the inequalities seen everywhere. The slave owners of the south were wise in declining to let their slaves be educated. Education leads to investigation, and had the slaves been able to read the literature of the times, it would not have been long before they would have been slaves no more. Just so with the children of the poor everywhere. Educate them, and they will not remain slaves to superstition and authority. They will burst their fetters and become free men and free women, and industrial as well as other bondages will cease.

Someone may remark that we have free schools, and the children of the poor are now being educated, yet they don't seem to be doing any better than their parents and grandparents. In fact some of them do not appear to be doing so well. How is this to be explained? It is true, education is more diffused than

ever before, and the attendance of children at public and private schools is continually on the increase, yet the stolidity of the parents, and the respect for authority by the children, as taught them by their parents, is so great that the momentum in this direction has not been sufficiently stayed to have any great effect. If the reader will drop into the state factory inspector's office of a morning, and see the specimens of motherhood and fatherhood that bring their children there to get papers enabling them to be put to work, my meaning will be plain. As a rule the children are much brighter than the parents; but there is such a gap between what is and what should be, in the matter of education, that it is depressing to one who desires to see the human race making more rapid strides toward industrial freedom. People sometimes complain that children are no longer respectful to their parents. Do parents as a rule give any indication of being entitled to respect? They are submitting to conditions against which any intelligent child should protest. They are opinionated, servile, self-willed, and altogether despicable. Do you ask for proof? See the millionaires on one side, and the miserable poor on the other. There is an object lesson in ignorance. If fathers having the power to change these conditions are not willing to do it, why should their children have any respect for them?

But in truth, education along economic lines, for the masses, is just beginning. The "dismal science" has become a living problem. Crude as has been much of the literature on the subject, yet it has held the seeds of great truths that, despite tares and uncongenial soil, is destined to bring forth great harvests. Until Henry George, by the magic of his brain, that was given its economic twist by unique experiences, seriously considered the problem of increasing poverty in the midst of increasing wealth, the people were being slowly driven to the only alternative—socialism. "The coming slavery" loomed up on the horizon like a great

thunder cloud, and within its black expanse were huge thunderbolts, bound to do some good when the final discharges took place, but also sure to slay right and left. Yet with all its obstructiveness the socialistic storm would have brought relief. It would have been better than economic serfdom. No one wonders then, that the socialists denounced Henry George because he leaped between them and their prey. He pointed out as no other man ever had, and so clearly that the most simple minded could grasp the situation, that the great industrial evils of the age had their life and being in one great economic error: Making private property of that which the good God never intended to be monopolized. If heaven had any such system in the ownership of its area as prevails on earth, the same inequalities in happiness would prevail there as are seen here. It could not be otherwise, and even the philanthropy of the twelve disciples would not help it. Give the first comers everything, and the last comers will have nothing.

As the world was not made in a day—nor in six days—so the final triumph of liberty, equality and fraternity cannot be accomplished in a decade or two. The human race is advancing, and industrial freedom will come in due time, when the people understand that God's gift to all cannot be monopolized by a few, except to the detriment of the many. The hope of sharing in the spoils, that makes so many willing to endure present conditions, will some day vanish, and there will come in its stead a willingness to be satisfied with what each one produces. The mountains of wealth will be leveled down, and the valleys of want will be filled up. There will be a dead level of prosperity, just as there is a dead level of ability, with here and there an exception to prove the rule. The workingman and the banker, in that day, will not be so far apart, socially and financially, as now. What will be one's gain will not in every respect be a loss to the other. Each will have the satisfaction of knowing

that at last equal chances have come to all, and the workingman and the banker will be aware that what each has is his by right of production.

The late Thos. G. Shearman made an estimate of the various classes owning the wealth of the country. His figures, which have never been successfully contradicted, are:

Families.	Average wealth.	Total.
10.....	\$100,000,000	\$1,000,000,000
100.....	25,000,000	2,500,000,000
1,200.....	6,000,000	7,200,000,000
2,000.....	2,200,000	4,400,000,000
1,000.....	1,400,000	1,400,000,000
2,000.....	1,000,000	2,000,000,000
4,000.....	700,000	2,800,000,000
13,000.....	400,000	5,200,000,000
52,000.....	150,000	7,800,000,000
160,000.....	60,000	9,600,000,000
200,000.....	20,000	4,000,000,000
1,000,000.....	3,500	5,500,000,000
11,565,000.....	1,000	11,175,000,000
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13,000,310.....		\$62,575,000,000
Public property, churches, etc.....		\$2,500,000,000

Condensing this table so as to arrange it in three great classes, this result is obtained:

Class.	Families.	Wealth.	Average per family.
Rich	235,310	\$43,900,000,000	\$186,567
Middle	1,200,000	7,500,000,000	6,250
Working	11,565,000	11,175,000,000	968
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Total	13,000,310	\$62,575,000,000	\$4,813

On this basis, 50,000 families would appear to own one-half of the national property. Can there, then, be any "equal chance"?