

CHAPTER XXV

THE DEMOCRACY OF TO-MORROW

WE are beginning to see that democracy is something more than the freedom to speak, to write, to worship as one wills, to be faced with one's accusers, and to be tried by one's peers; it involves far more than the absence of absolute government or the tyranny of an hereditary caste. The right of participation in the government, irrespective of birth, race, and creed, and the substitution of manhood suffrage and democratic forms for monarchical institutions, do not of themselves constitute democracy, immeasurably valuable as these achievements are.

Democracy, too, involves far more than a system of taxation that is ethically just; it involves far more than the right to trade where one wills, unrestrained by tariff laws; it involves far more than the taking by the community of the wealth that the community creates or the ownership by the people of the highways, so essential to the common life. These fundamental changes in the relation of mankind to its environment do not constitute an end in themselves, any more than does the right of the ballot or of participation in the government. All

these things are but means to an end, and that end is industrial freedom, a freedom as full and as free to the poor as to the rich, to the next generation and the generations which follow as it was to the generations which spread themselves out upon an unappropriated continent. Freedom is an industrial far more than a political condition.

Unfortunately the idea of freedom suggests license when demanded for all, just as it involves license when enjoyed by the few. Privilege invokes the beneficence of freedom when it would stay the hand of the state in any attempt to control its excesses, just as it invokes the perils of freedom when it would be protected from its consequences. Privilege protests in the name of freedom against regulation of the railways or the franchise corporations, or the protection by law of children, women workers, and those engaged in hazardous pursuits. It attacks the labor union, the closed shop, and the eight-hour day as subversive of personal liberty, but invokes another argument for protection from foreign competition or the right to monopoly combinations.

The political economist as well as the socialist has confounded the evils of the present industrial system with freedom. *Laissez faire* is credited with the tenement, the sweat-shop, and the excesses of capitalism. But freedom, even the *laissez faire* of Quesnay, Turgot, Dupont de Nemours, and the

brilliant school of thinkers who laid the foundation for the abolition of the feudal system and the oppressive restraints of mercantilism, is a far different thing from the travesty of industrial liberty which has masqueraded for nearly a century under that name. For nowhere has there been freedom, the freedom of access by humanity to the source of all life. The land and the resources of nature have been locked up with title-deeds of private ownership, and mankind has been forced to content itself with such opportunities as privilege offered. True freedom, true *laissez faire*, involves the shattering of all these chains with which labor is bound, and the opening up of the earth to the free play of individual talent. It involves, too, freedom of trade and the free public highway. This is the philosophy of freedom.

Freedom is the law to which all life responds. Freedom underlies the philosophy of evolution, which all science has approved. Through freedom all animate life has progressed; to its call the cave man of the stone age has advanced by slow and tortuous processes up to the civilized type of to-day. But the application of this principle to human society has been limited to the formulation of the law of the struggle for existence, with the medium of that struggle ignored.

And freedom is the law of conscious as well as of unconscious evolution, of historic as well as of pre-

historic ages. From the very beginnings of organized society the progress of man has been in almost direct ratio to his liberty. This is written across the face of history from the time of the Grecian city-states down to the latest experiment in nation-building in the distant Pacific. It was economic freedom that enabled the Roman people to bring all Italy to their feet. It was the home-owning soldier who carried Roman arms all over Italy. It was economic freedom that spread the republic over the face of Europe and gave to Rome the supremacy of the world. It was the same economic liberty which awakened the Renaissance and resuscitated commerce in the towns of Italy and Germany during the Middle Ages. It was freedom to make and to trade which builded the congeries of free cities from the Adriatic to the mouth of the Rhine, and called into life the civilization which had been buried in the East for centuries. It was this sort of freedom which gave eminence to Venice, to Florence, to Genoa, to the Netherlands, an eminence which was later seized by Great Britain when she broke free from the restraints imposed by the feudal classes on trade, industry, and commerce.

Wherever restrictive laws have been abolished, wherever the rock of economic privilege has been smitten with the touch of liberty, wealth has gushed forth as it never did before. New processes, new ideas, new inventions are awakened by the call of

freedom, whether it be the opportunity to produce as one wills, to trade as one wills, or, far more important, to make use of the earth free from the dead hand of speculation.

Two great nations have in different ways and at different times shaken themselves free from the chains of privilege. They broke but the obvious chains which bound them, it is true, but the effect was electrical on the production and distribution of wealth. When the States General was convened in 1789, France was entwined with as many laws as the threads which bound Gulliver. There was no freedom of thought, no freedom of action, no freedom of trade or commerce even within the kingdom. No one could labor at a trade or calling without being admitted to a closed corporation. No one could manufacture anything or plant anything except according to rules laid down by the state. The state regulated everything. The individual could originate nothing. Even the kind of tools to be used was prescribed, as were the width and quality of cloth. Every product which did not conform to rule was confiscated or burned. Individuals could not sell or buy, except on permission of the state. Exports of grain, even to the next province, were prohibited. Agriculture bore every burden the seigneurs or their agents could devise. The peasant paid a rack-rent to the lord as well as all the taxes to the state. He had to work on the estate of

the lord and keep the roads in repair. His lands were shot over, and devastated by game. He had to grind his grain at the mill of the lord and press out his wine at the lord's press. Most of the taxes were paid by the poor, while the administration of justice was in the hands of the privileged class. All life, all novelty, all liberty of thought or action was suppressed.

On the night of August 4, 1789, the National Assembly entirely destroyed the feudal *régime*. Society received a new birth. It was purged, as is man by disease or a base metal by fire. The face of France was swept of a thousand abuses, as the face of the prairie is swept by flame. Man and the land were left naked of countless privileges. The worker was free to produce, to buy, to sell, and to exchange. What his mind and hand produced remained in great measure his own. There remained neither nobility nor peerage, nor hereditary distinction, nor distinctive orders, nor feudal *régime*, nor any other superiority except that of public officials in the exercise of their function. Better than all that, there remained to no Frenchman any privilege or exception to the rights which are common to all Frenchmen. Farming of taxes was later abolished. The domains of the clergy were assumed by the state. There was a redistribution of taxes. There was freedom in production and exchange. The old *régime* was destroyed. The foundations of liberty were laid for all the world.

Within the next few years industry, talent, and genius sprang into action. From the farm and the town the armies of France were recruited in the name of liberty. For the first time in their history the people were conscious that the nation meant something to them. The army of France became invincible. The peasant and the artisan, enfranchised from the multitude of vexatious interferences which had controlled every act of their lives, turned to their work with a new light in their eyes and a new hope in their heart. It was the night of August 4, 1789, and "The Self-Denying Ordinance" that made the revolution permanent. It was this that sent its blessings into every corner of Europe, and brought forth in Germany the reforms of Stein and Hardenberg.

A half century later England opened her ports to the commerce of the world. She did not destroy the abuses of the feudal *regime*. Very many of these abuses still remain. But she abolished the corn laws imposed by the landlords in control of Parliament for the protection of their rents. The increase in production which followed surpassed the expectations of Cobden and Bright. England was converted into a vast industrial establishment. She became the clearing-house of the world. Her exports increased from \$288,934,380 in 1846 (the year of the repeal) to \$356,795,920 in 1850. In 1853 they were \$494,668,905, and in 1857 \$610,000,000.

Freedom of trade revolutionized Great Britain. It was a revolution which benefited chiefly a limited class. Free trade did not destroy poverty. It did not relieve the agricultural worker, nor did it find decent homes for the tenement dweller. Free trade did benefit the manufacturer and the trader. It increased the value of the land of the United Kingdom by calling into existence great cities and towns wherein four-fifths of the population now dwell. It was freedom, the freedom to buy and sell, unrestrained by artificial barriers erected by legislation, that explained the immediate ascendancy of the British people in industry. Colossal as were these benefits of freedom, they are inconsequential in comparison with those which would follow from the freeing of the land as well.

And it was economic freedom that made America what she is. It was this that lies at the foundation of our democracy. It was not the Declaration of Independence, it was not the Federal Constitution, it was not the freedom from an established church or hereditary privilege, it was not even the ballot; it was freedom of access to the earth and all its fulness, it was the free land that explained our institutions, it was this that gave us industrial eminence. The things we hold most dear are but the reflections of the relations of the American people to the land. And it is the passing of this freedom, it is the enclosure of the land and the

coming of the tenant, it is the monopoly of that which is the source of all life, that has brought down the curse of poverty upon us, just as it did in Rome, just as it did in France, just as it did in Ireland, and just as it did in England at a later day.

The remedy herein proposed will restore the foundations upon which democracy is laid. It will insure liberty for all time. It will insure equality of opportunity in every walk of life and will guarantee to the worker all that his genius, his talent, or his labor produces. The open door, the open highway, and the socialization of the land will destroy the tribute now exacted by monopoly. It will usher in a social order in which men will be as free from the fear of want as they are from want itself. Then men will look forward not to diminishing, but to increasing opportunities, for freedom will not only continuously augment the wealth of the world, it will insure its just distribution to those who produce it.