

SOCIAL SERVICE

CHAPTER I.

Introduction.

Leaning back in our chairs at a cozy restaurant, you and I, smoking it may be while we talk across the table, our conversation possibly turns to the dinner we have just had—not sensuously as with gluttons, but reflectively as men interested in the whys and the wherefores even of the commonplace.

A question has influenced the current of our thoughts. How did we get this dinner? By what magic was that variety of appetizing food laid before us at our pleasure and upon our request? Is there in truth an Aladdin's lamp? Are there omnipotent genii to work wonders at an Aladdin's touch? Let us recall the circumstances.

When we entered the restaurant, a neatly dressed well mannered gentleman conducted us to this table. He was none of your genii of a thousand Arabian nights, but a man like ourselves. He serves his fellow men, and they call him not inaptly the "head waiter." Having seen us comfortably seated, the head waiter turned his attention elsewhere, leaving another neatly dressed and well mannered gentleman—none of your mythical genii either, but a fellow man whom they call a "waiter"—to take our orders for food. The waiter withdrew upon getting our orders, and presently returned with a supply of crockery, silverware,

napkins and other table furnishings. In due time he brought us our food, course by course, then our coffee, and finally the cigars we are smoking and the little jar of matches with which we light them.

So much we saw. But there was more that we did not notice, and vastly more that we could not have seen had we tried—all a part of the necessary process of serving our dinner. Neither the waiter nor the head waiter was a magician who could say "Let there be bread," and there is bread; or "Let there be" this or that, and it comes. Workers like themselves must have responded to their directions, whether we saw the other workers or not. Though we did not see a cook, there was a cook in the hot kitchen who served us as truly as the waiter did, and without whose aid the waiter could not have served us at all. We did not see the furniture makers, nor the silversmiths, nor the spinners and the weavers, nor the makers of the lighting appliances, nor the crockery makers, of whom the implements and furnishings for our comfort in eating must have been procured. Neither did we see the cigar makers nor the tobacco raisers whose product we are now turning into fragrant smoke, nor the makers of the matches we have burned, nor the decorators who made these walls sightly, nor the builders who erected the house in which we sit, nor the printers and paper makers who supplied the bill of fare. Yet all these craftsmen have in greater or less degree made it possible for the waiter to serve us as he has done. Each has been an operator in the process. Altogether, they have co-operated.

Even when all these co-operative craftsmen are considered, the roll of co-operators to whom we are indebted for this dinner is far from complete. Back of the cook are tradesmen who supply the

kitchen with cooking implements and food materials, and carriers who deliver them. Back of these are wholesalers who have supplied the tradesmen—all equipped with their respective clerks and bookkeepers and other helpers or co-operators. Back of these again are the builders of their stores, the makers of their delivery wagons that rattle through the streets, the builders of railroads and cars, and the railroad men who operate them. Still farther back in the order of this simple dinner service are millers, butchers, ranchers, farmers, cotton raisers and cotton pickers, sailors, shipwrights, miners, lumbermen, coffee producers, oyster dredgers, fishermen, plowmen, hunters, dairymen—an infinite variety of producers and traders, with commercial ramifications extending all over the world. Get the picture into your mind. Don't you see that we have broken into a labyrinth of social service so confusing as to defy complete description in detail?

That match, now, with which you have relighted your cigar—look at it. It is only a little sliver of wood charred at one end where a moment ago, before you took it from its fellows in the jar, there was a crust of sulphur and a hardened dab of phosphorus—the simplest item of all the objects that have contributed to our enjoyment at this table to-night. Yet he would be a learned specialist of many specialties who could write the biography of that match. Try it for yourself. The waiter fetched it for you. It had been bought in a package of the grocer up the street, and he had sent the package here by one of the boys he hires. Before that he himself had bought it in a larger package of a wholesale merchant, who in turn had bought it of the manufacturer, who had bought the wood of lumbermen and the sulphur and the phosphorus of an importer. The story thus far is not difficult in its general outlines. Neither would

it be very difficult to trace the lumber back through a saw mill to the chopper in the forest, the sulphur to some gypsum bed perhaps, and the phosphorus back through the fumes of deadly factories to collections of old bones. But when your imagination turns to the collateral co-operators, you begin to realize the meaning of infinite complexity. For you must pick up the threads of the story of the wood chopper's axe, and follow them back from the axe in his hand to the forest where the helve was cut and the mine whence the ore was taken, through all the intervening channels of manufacture and sale not only of the axe itself but of all the implements used in its making and final delivery. Then you must repeat this confusing process with the saw mill and its implements and the implements with which they were made; and after that, if your interest does not flag, with all the delicate machinery of the match factory and the delicate machinery with which that delicate machinery itself was made. By this time you will have a liberal education in the industrial arts, sufficient perhaps to give you a hint of other and even more confusing labyrinths to explore before you can definitely tell how that little match got away from its native condition and into your hands just as you needed a light for your cigar.

If now you begin to realize the bewildering complexity of the social process of merely providing the materials for the dinner we have had, turn your attention to the service of marshaling and adapting those materials so as to make a dinner of them. Think of the function, for instance, of the proprietor of this restaurant, our good friend Joseph over there. Without his service all the other service would have been useless to us. It was his forethought and skill that brought into such correlation as exactly to meet our needs for

a dinner at a particular place and hour, the services of the head waiter, of the waiter and the cook, of the artisans who made the room comfortable and sightly, and of all the army of social servitors whose co-operative usefulness to us we have been trying to realize and appreciate. But if we really could comprehend, as neither you nor I nor any one else can possibly do, the details of the labyrinth of social service involved in supplying a restaurant dinner, as simple even as ours has been, we should still be only on the edge of understanding the details of social service.

Let us then, as we leave the restaurant, pursue our thought, but with reference to other needs and comforts than those of the table.

We are now on a street car. Here is a motor-man who takes us to your home. Here are cars that other men have built to enable him to do it. These cars, like the match at the restaurant, have their complex history, beginning in mine and forest—alike for materials for the cars and for the tools, the machinery and the buildings necessary for their construction, and the mechanism necessary for propulsion—and ending as we find them now, in carriages rolling along upon railed pavements. Then there are the rails, the trolley wire, the power houses, with a regiment of men to maintain and operate the system so that a car may be ready for us when we are ready to go home. Again you are in a labyrinth of social service.

Behold the same bewildering complexity as we stop to leave an order at the corner grocery near your house. A clerk takes your order, a deliverer will bring the goods to your door. But back of the clerk is the grocer himself, who has stocked the store, who thoughtfully keeps it stocked, and who in other ways superintends its affairs, so that you and your neighbors may have groceries of

your choice and at your convenience. But back of grocer and grocer's assistants are wholesalers, manufacturers, importers, transporters by land and sea, exporters at scores of foreign seaports, original producers in a thousand distant places—all told, an army and a navy of workmen, clerks, sailors, and helpers of every kind.

So it is with your clothing. Those shoes came from a department store, as did your hat, your underwear, your furnishings, and, since you are not fastidious about wearing tailor-made clothing, as did also your coat, your trousers and your waistcoat. Several clerks have helped you in your purchases, and department store deliverers have brought the goods to your house. Again you are in a whirl of social service. For back of the clerks and deliverers are managers and sub-managers; and back of them are transporters and manufacturers and mechanical workmen, while back of these are farmers and planters and herders and butchers and tanners, and so on and on in an infinite complexity of wholesale stores and their owners, of managers and clerks, of factories, mines, forests, farms, ranches and railroads in our own country, of factories, mines, forests, sheep-folds, and railroads in other countries, of ships, drays, warehouses and machines, with their millions upon millions of men, and even of women and children, all co-operatively toiling to render service, such service as you receive from the clothing you wear.

Are we now at your house? Did you ever ask yourself where this house came from? Nature provided the materials, it is true, but not in their present convenient place and comfortable form. Architects and builders with their various assistants, reinforced by an army of lumbermen, brickmakers, miners, transporters and traders in confusing variety, made you this house. Not your

own house, do you say? You are only a tenant? Very well; then an additional co-operator, the house owner, has served you by marshaling the services of the builders to have the house ready for your use at a time and in a place to suit your wants.

As with this house that you are about to enter and which you call your home, so with all the houses of your neighbors. So with everything any of us may use. Workers, workers, workers; here, there, everywhere! Growing, constructing, carrying—doing. It is quite impossible to describe, almost impossible to imagine in any detail, the incessant work, the continuous service, the intricate co-operation that make it possible for you and me to get as we want them a house to live in, a ride on a street car, a choice of groceries, a dinner at a restaurant, a cigar to smoke, even a match to light it with. And minute as we have tried to be, we have nevertheless overlooked the bankers, who play an important part in all this work, and we have made no account of lawyers, doctors, teachers, actors, authors, clergymen, journalists and hosts of other social servitors, who in some way or other, directly or indirectly, minister to our desires.

How is it possible to fix your attention at all, even superficially, upon these facts of common observation, without realizing, and in a startling way if you have never thought of the matter before, that some people are incessantly serving other people, and that everybody is somehow and somewhere being all the time served by somebody else? To the extent of our demands, at restaurants and hotels, upon street cars, at grocery stores, at department stores, in housebuilding and housekeeping, in clothes-making and clothes-selling, in sickness at the hospital or at home, and by all manner of persons through all manner of

trades and professions, from the first gasp of breath at birth to the placing of a tombstone at the last, we are in the midst of a whirl of social service; and, to that extent, every person the wide world over who helps immediately or remotely, in great degree or in little degree, to satisfy our demands at the time when and at the place where we make them, is serving us. Though the details of this service be so numerous and so bewildering in their complexity as to defy statistical notation, yet the great general fact is clear enough. The coffee picker in Porto Rico, the tobacco stripper in Cuba, the rancher in Texas, the butcher in Packingtown, the farmer on Western prairie or in Eastern valley, the baker around the corner, the sailormen, the railroad crews, the store clerks whom we face across counters, the bankers and their clerks who transfer credits, the builders of houses, factories and machines, the army of workmen of every grade from drudge to manager, serve us as effectively as the genii of his lamp served Aladdin, but in very truth instead of Oriental fable.

Now what do we do for our fellows in return for their service to us?

If we turn our thoughts from their serviceable activities, inward upon our own activities, we shall find that in some way we too (unless we are idle pensioners upon our brethren, or industrious only as parasites) are contributing our share to the ceaseless interflow of social service.

As lawyer, doctor, actor, author, teacher, mechanic, farmer, or what you will, everybody who pays his way is serving others even as they serve him; and the reason that they serve him, unless they act from coercion, personal affection, or pity, is because he serves them. Social service is in its last analysis an intricate interchange of individual services.

If all those who serve were to stop serving, all who are served, even the richest, would be almost instantly impoverished. Concrete accumulations of past exchanges of service, such as houses, clothing, food supplies, and so on, would be of little use were social service to cease. Though houses would still exist they would answer for little more than shelter and not long for that, and meanwhile each of us would have to be his own housekeeper; though food were in the larder the supply would be exhausted soon, and meanwhile each of us would have to be his own cook. Interchanges of service, when normal—that is, when free to flow in accordance with the need for service and the will to serve,—maintain an equilibrium at which the service that each renders to others is balanced by the service that others render to him.

This balance is obvious enough when, for instance, Farmer Doe does a day's work for Farmer Roe at haying, in exchange for a day's work in harvest. There is no complexity in such a case. The two farmers could easily keep the accounts. A debit in Doe's books and a credit in Roe's of one day's work to Farmer Roe at haying, is balanced in both books by a cross credit and a cross debit at harvest time. But if Doe's little boy should swap an egg for a stick of candy at the store, or Mrs. Doe trade butter for groceries, a great complexity would be introduced. The army of candy makers, beginning with sugar planters and running through the long list of workmen in refinery and factory and railroading and ocean navigation, and the armies of machinists and builders behind them all—these have no debit and credit account with Mr. Doe or any member of his family. Neither have the army of grocery producers. Perhaps none of them but the grocer ever heard of him; nor did any of them work especially for him or his wife or his little boy. They worked

for whomsoever there might be to want the final consumable product of their work, though at the end of a thousand manufacturing transmutations and commercial exchanges. In our illustration it would have been the Doe boy that happened to want that particular stick of candy, and the Doe family that happened to want those particular groceries. But this would only have happened so. The boy might have wanted other candy or the family other groceries, made and transported in part at least by other workmen. Yet the social service of Farmer Doe is as truly balanced off when the exchange is for candies or groceries at the store as when it is for a day's work with a neighbor. The difference is only a difference in the extent and intricacy of interchange. In essentials there is no difference.

It may have been tedious to you, my friend, to thread your way through all this detail, and you may have been a little bored with the "damnable iteration." But it will help you to generalize the industrial phenomena that come under your observation; and this is necessary if you care to understand the natural laws of social service. While we all know that social service consists of an infinite complexity of individual exchanges, we are so accustomed to thinking of the subject loosely or not at all, that we are apt to find ourselves at sea when we come to test unfamiliar generalizations. Especially do we fail to associate what is commonly called trade, with social service as an indispensable characteristic. Haven't you yourself been derelict in this respect? But now, as you recall the thread of our thought, don't you see that civilized life is in some sort a social organism of infinite complexity, which derives its vitality from the interflow of trade—from intricate interchanges of innumerable individual services?

This social organism, like any other organism,

must be explainable. There must pertain to it a science or know-why, which, when the true lines of inquiry are perceived, will enable us to understand its normal conditions and to detect and account for abnormal or diseased manifestations. By whatever name this science may be called—as economics, political economy, catallactics, or what you please—it must be evident, if you reflect upon the industrial phenomena we have run lightly over, that in so far as it may be a science at all it must be the science which accounts for the phenomena of social service.

Nor is it necessary to an understanding of this science that you should be familiar with those bewildering details and elusive complexities of exchange about which we have talked. It would be as possible for you to direct every line of service as to apprehend the complex relations of each individual act of service to every other. You could do neither. In running lightly over those details together we had no purpose of comprehensively pursuing their ramifications; it was only to indicate and emphasize the interrelation of all such details. What one needs to grasp, for an understanding of the science of social service, is not the details themselves, but the fact of the intricate interrelation of all such details in one great phenomenon—the co-operative life of man. To realize how mankind considered as a social whole makes a living, is the needful thing. We shall be helped in doing this if we recur to our dinner at the restaurant.

Why was that dinner served upon our order?

It was not a chummy affair, except between you and me. The waiters and the cook and the proprietor acted from another impulse than that of personal comradeship. Theirs was the impulse of business, not of sociability. Perhaps they enjoyed serving us; perhaps their sentiments were

profoundly fraternal. Let us hope so. All social service should be vitalized with the spirit of fraternalism. But would we have thanked them for giving us the dinner for nothing? I think not. We should have considered the offer an impertinence. For fraternalism means equilibrium, balance, service for service. What service, then, did we render for that dinner?

So far as we can follow out the details through their intricate windings we are unable to show that we gave for it any service at all. You work as a doctor and I work as a lawyer; but you have done no "doctoring" nor I any "lawing" for a single person, as far as we know, who helped furnish that dinner. Nor does either of us ever expect to, or any of them expect it of us. Why, then, did they furnish the dinner? If none of them had been served in any way by us, if none of them expected to be served by us, yet if they were serving us on the basis of service for service, why did they serve us who probably have not served them and probably shall not? Ask our friend Joseph, he who marshaled in due season and due proportion all the cooperative service of the world, including his own, that was necessary to minister to our gustatory wants of that hour. He will tell you. And in whatever phrase he may reply, his answer will be that he expected us to give him money according to an agreed price.

Isn't that what we did in fact? And wasn't he satisfied with it? What then is money, that Joseph should have taken it for service from him and his co-operators to us, in lieu of service from us to him and them?

Money—well, for the present let us say that money is a certificate of title to social service. That was the function it performed for us. We gave it as a means whereby Joseph should pay in the social service market for the particular charac-

ter of service he might be already indebted for, or obtain the particular character of service he might thereafter desire. We transferred to him our title to that service.

How did we get the money? You must answer that question yourself, for you paid our dinner check. If you picked somebody's pocket for it, you haven't paid for our dinner—not in the great "round up" or equilibrium of social service—even though Joseph is satisfied. The man you robbed, and not you, has in that case involuntarily paid for two dinners he hasn't had. And it is much the same—don't be startled—if the money was part of your income from royalties for that Pennsylvania coal deposit in which you have an interest. For don't you see that you can no more pay for dinners with coal royalties than with money picked from somebody's pocket? You render no service to anybody by giving miners permission to work natural coal deposits. Why not? Because neither you nor any one from whom you get title made those coal deposits. You might as well think you were rendering human service by permitting your fellow men to breathe God's air as by permitting them to dig God's coal. So far as the equilibrium of social service is concerned, it doesn't make a particle of difference whether you paid for our dinner with money picked from a pocket against the law, or extorted from coal miners according to law. In neither case do you render a service for the service you get. Who does render it? We haven't the time to inquire into that just now. It is enough for present purposes that in either of these instances no service is rendered by you. But of course you didn't pick a pocket; and of course, if you paid for our dinner with coal royalties the fault is no more yours than mine and Joseph's and the miners' and all the rest, for allowing our laws to give an institutional advantage

to you. In fact you got the money from a patient for hard work? Very good, then it is you that have paid for our dinner. Nor does it make any difference, so far as you and I and Joseph are concerned, whether your patient rendered service for the money he gave you or not. If he did not, then he has failed to that extent to maintain the equilibrium of social service. But you have not failed. You have maintained the equilibrium of social service for yourself by earning your own dinner, and for me in the hospitality of friendship by earning mine.

The certificate of your service in the form of money you have passed over to Joseph, and upon him rests the responsibility of putting that certificate into the proper channels for transferring your right to social service, to the extent of that amount of money, to all the co-operators who have contributed their service to the making of our dinner.

As with our dinner, so with all the other forms of service to which we have referred. Two nickels gave us our street car ride. A greenback "squared" you with the grocer. Your clothing bill was balanced and your landlord was appeased with checks or orders upon your bank to pay money to the amount of the agreed value of their service to you. That handsome gold watch which you have just put back into your pocket,—didn't you buy it with money? And didn't Hyman-Berg take the money in exchange for their service to you in letting you have the watch? Wasn't it their pay, to their complete satisfaction, for having marshaled the multifarious services of an army of workers in order to bring into their stock, in perfect condition, through all the transmutations and transportations of watchmaking, from the natural state of its raw materials in the mines, and to hold in store for your purchase at your pleasure, that

delicately contrived mechanism of magic service-ability? As you had given your service for the money with which you bought the watch, you gave your service for the watch you bought with the money. Although money is not service, it is a means whereby interchanges of service are effected. It is in the nature of a certificate of service rendered *by* its possessor, which is redeemable in service to be rendered *for* its possessor.