

CHAPTER XI.

Derangements of the Mechanism of Social Service.

In our talks, Doctor, since that day at Joseph's restaurant when a chance remark about our dinner led us on to a serious inquiry into the complex phenomena which had produced the dinner for us just when we wanted it and where it was most convenient to sit down to it—in our talks since then upon the subject of social service we have had frequent occasion to allude to its pathology. But now that we come to consider maladjustments of the social service mechanism, I am really not quite sure that pathology is the fitting word. Is there a pathology of mechanism, I wonder, or had we better use another term? I guess you are right; the word doesn't make any difference. But may be we can avoid hypercriticism by saying "derangement" in this particular connection.

That there are derangements in the mechanism of social service is evident to most of us at intervals and to some of us constantly. When men and women who work hard all their lives at useful service to others in the mechanism of social service get very little service from others in return, something must be out of order with the mechanism; for it has no other normal function than to facilitate exchanges of service for service. How can any one doubt the derangement when there is slack demand for social service of any kind in a world which hungers and thirsts for social service of all kinds? And isn't it a fact that the keener this hunger and the more raging this thirst for social service, the slacker the opportunities relatively for

rendering it? What an absurd condition! Isn't it true, too, that those who beg for opportunities to render social service which others want, suffer for lack of social service; and that men and women who render little or no service to anybody through all their lives, are nevertheless served abundantly? You know, Doctor, that these absurd contrasts are common; and surely such conditions prove derangement in the social service mechanism. While it may be natural for parasites to get sustenance, it isn't natural for their victims to furnish it voluntarily. Why, if old Farmer Doe's fanning machine had got to scattering the wheat to the winds and pouring the chaff into bags for the flouring mill, both you and I, boys as we were, would have known that it was out of order. But a fanning machine that gives the wheat to the winds and the chaff to the miller would no more certainly be out of order than is a social service mechanism that automatically enriches idlers and impoverishes workers.

Aye, aye; I do know that some folks think the disorder of this mechanism must be highly complicated, so complicated that it will take millions of years of painful evolution to bring it into good running order, or else that the injustices of its operation are due to the inscrutable decrees of Providence. But complex evils do not always have complex causes. Nor are the decrees of Providence so very inscrutable if you look at them instead of away from them. The evils of the Johnstown flood some twenty years ago were tremendously complex, you remember, but the cause was as simple as the collapse of a dam in the channel of a running stream; and as for the "inscrutable decrees of Providence" in that instance, weren't they as rational as a syllogism?

I shouldn't be surprised, don't you know, to find that our periodical convulsions in social service are

due to the same derangements of the mechanism which cause the constant poverty of the working masses, and that these derangements are as simple and perhaps as easy of correction as a gravel in a shoe. Periods of hard times seem to be acute phases of a chronic derangement.

What I insist upon is that every one should get an equivalent in service for the service he gives; if he doesn't get that, it must be either that the service he offers or the service he seeks is in some way diverted. I insist further, that every one's service should be in demand as long as others want service such as his and are willing to give their own in exchange; if it isn't demanded to that extent, the explanation must be that the diversion of service from those who serve has weakened the power of each to employ the others. This latter thought would seem more familiar, may be, if I were to say that slack demand for service is due to a weakening of the purchasing power of consumers. But remember that producers and consumers are normally the same lot of folks. In the character of producer, each serves others; and in return, in the character of consumer, each is served by others. The non-producer who is a consumer is either a pensioner or an interloper. Don't you see that slack employment, due to a weakening of the purchasing power of consumers, proves upon analysis to be caused by a weakening of the power of social servitors to employ one another?

This weakening of the powers of mutual employment is in its turn, as I have already said, traceable to some derangement in the mechanism of social service which diverts social service from the normal exchanges of service for service to abnormal exchanges of service for no service. For how can there be any check upon the interchange of mutually desired services, short of positive inhibition by autocratic might, unless there is some

such diversion of service? And how can there be such a diversion of service, short of high handed confiscation, unless the social service mechanism is deranged? That some such derangement, creating a cumulative "rake-off" of service from those who serve to those who do not, would produce the evils we are considering, is almost mathematically certain. Sooner or later a cumulative "rake-off" would unbalance interchanges of service even to the point of disastrously slowing down the mechanism. Though the "rake-off" were a small one, yet if it were constant, and especially if it were also cumulative, it would be like Croasdale's solitary bumble bee, which, "being industrious, broke up a whole camp meeting."

It's the "rake-off," Doctor, that breaks up the game. You haven't forgotten your old poker wisdom, have you? Ah! Well, I'm a little rusty myself on that sly recreation of our welsh-rarebit days; but I remember Georgia Pete's "kitty" pretty well, and I reckon you'll remember it too, confidentially at any rate, when I remind you of how it broke up our game. It seemed inexpensive enough—didn't it?—just to drop one little chip into Georgia Pete's "kitty" with every good winning. The winner didn't mind it, for his winnings were such that one chip wasn't missed and he was happy enough anyhow to be generous; the others didn't mind it either, for it wasn't their chip. But don't you recollect now how that open mouthed "kitty" drew and drew until we got to saying that "kitties" and mustard plasters were synonymous terms? At last we began to realize, you know, that if we kept on going to Georgia Pete's it would be only a question of time when the "kitty" would get all we had; and so Georgia Pete's absorbent "kitty" did for us what monitory influences had failed to do—it broke up our poker game. There is something vaguely suggestive to me about that

clandestine experience. It "sort-o'" hints at the destructive power of the "rake-off" in social service. A steady diversion, from service for service to service for no service, must tend to bring the social service mechanism to a standstill.

As interchanges of service for service slow down, in consequence of the diversion of service, from exchanges of service for service to exchanges of service for monopoly, the phenomena of poverty among the workers in contrast with wealth among the luckier idlers, become more and more pronounced. You have observed it, haven't you? At first there is a little pressure, impoverishing only to individuals here and there who happen to be nearest to the point of contact. Then there is an extension of the pressure over a wider field, causing more individual impoverishment with greater intensity. And so on, until the field of friction becomes so wide and the jarring and grinding so general that the impoverishment which has been attributed to individual inefficiency or misfortune takes on the aspects of business stagnation. How well I remember, away back in the '70's, how the folks out our way kept on blaming little Jimmie Buckley for "failing up" in '72. But along in '75 'Squire Hamilton "failed up," too, and then they pitied the 'Squire as a victim of hard times. So long as it was only little Jimmie, he failed from his own fault, you know; but when the old 'Squire went to the wall, hard times had crippled him. Haven't you ever noticed, Doctor, that with the great working mass it is hard times all the time, sometimes better and sometimes worse, but always bad, while hard times come to the "rake-off bunch" only periodically? But, bless you, how that "bunch" does groan when the periodical hits them!

The truth is, you see, that ordinary poverty is due to the difficulty among the masses of the

people of bringing about a swap of the services they are able to give for the services they want. As this difficulty expands and intensifies, the interlaced circles of trade are disrupted, and then we all realize what the working masses constantly feel, the monumental absurdity of a social service market in which, while nearly everybody wants to trade service for service, trading in service for service is stagnant.

What kind of derangement of the mechanism of social service can that derangement be, do you suppose, which runs with so much friction?

Scarcity of money? Why, money is only a medium of trade, a token, chips in the game. The thing traded is really not money but services, and services can be traded without money. How, then, can money be important fundamentally? By far the greater proportion of all transactions in the social service market are completed without money, as you will realize if you recall our clearing house talk; and the more the clearing house principle is improved the less money we need, swap for swap. With a perfect system of communal book-keeping, such as a perfect clearing house system would afford, we should need no money at all. But do you suppose that the great derangement of the social service mechanism would adjust itself if there were no need for money, or if the money system were perfect? Do you suppose that then we should have service for service? No? Of course you don't. We all know quite well that if chattel slavery were re-established, a perfect money system would make no difference to the slave. He wouldn't get service for service; slavery would give his share of social service over and above "his keep" to his master as a "rake-off." And don't you think that there are law-made ways of commanding this rake-off from servitors without owning their bodies? ways with which money has no more to do than chips

had to do with our old poker game? ways in connection with which, as with slavery, money only measures and keeps account of the rake-off?

Yes, tax obstructions to trade have that effect. But taxation is only one mode of obstructing trade. Bad money systems are another and railroad discriminations another. All these are essentially free trade questions. But if we had the most complete freedom of trade, short of freedom of production, we might, and I am confident we should, nevertheless suffer precisely as we do now. Our social service market would be in as great disorder. For in logical sequence production necessarily precedes trade, and if there is any disorder in the relation of the social service mechanism to production, the removal of trade disorders wouldn't be enough. It is only in case the maladjustment is wholly with reference to trade as distinguished from production, that a perfect adjustment as to trade would restore the social service mechanism. But we have only to reflect a little, Doctor, to realize that the maladjustment of the social service mechanism is not confined to its trading as distinguished from its producing functions. The probability is that the disorders of production are such that if all other disorders were corrected these corrections would only intensify the disorders from production.

Consider, Doctor, that without production there can be no trade but the most primitive. I might render you some slight personal service without producing anything for you; and you might repay with some slight personal service without producing anything for me. But this could go only a little way. If trading were confined to direct personal services there could be no civilized life. Even the services that we call personal in civilized life, such as those of the barber, the physician, the actor, the lawyer, and so on, can be performed, as

they are performed, only because there is production. When the barber cuts your hair or shaves your face, he utilizes tremendous productive power in the implements and processes and sources of supply of the machines that have enabled his co-operators in shaving you or cutting your hair, to turn out the simple tools of his trade. The production of goods, of machinery, of buildings—in a word, the production of commodities—is absolutely essential to the exchange of service for service in civilized life; and production necessitates implements, or, speaking more generally, instruments.

Am I alluding to the instruments of production and distribution that our socialistic neighbor down the street speaks of so often? To be sure I am. Would I have you suppose, then, that the fundamental derangements of the mechanism of social service are to be found in connection with the instruments of production and distribution? That is what I would have you understand, Doctor. And that the blight of poverty and the recurrence of periods of hard times, the diversion of service from the channels of service for service to those of service for no service, are finally traceable to inequalities of opportunity with reference to those instruments? Quite so. It is my conviction, Doctor, that the trouble lies exactly there. If we can adjust the mechanism of social service at that primary point, we shall be able with the greatest ease to make the secondary corrections. Most of them—all the related ones, I should say—would then correct themselves.

Since the interchanges of social service necessitate great stocks and constant reproductions of commodities, as I think any one can see, and this necessitates instruments of production and distribution vast in amount and unailing in supply, doesn't he who controls those instruments, whether

he be an individual or a class, doesn't he control both product and producer? Right there, Doctor, is the primary point for inspection if we think of the social service market as a mechanism, and for diagnosis if we think of it as an organism.

There are two great instruments of production, you will observe. I say instruments of production, without mentioning distribution, for distribution in the sense in which we are here using the word means delivery, and as you remember delivery is a part of the process of production. And of course I am speaking of categories of instruments, and not of individual items, whether little or big. When we get down to bed rock in our analysis, I think we shall find that one category comprises the artificial instruments of production, those that are produced by human art; and that the other—there are but two, mind you—comprises the natural instruments of production, those that are not produced by human art but are freely supplied by nature. No, no; of course I don't include a man's hands among the natural instruments of production—of course not; and well you may laugh at the thought. A man's hands are part of the man; and we are talking about the relation of the man to his environment, not about the relation of one part of him to another. It is the instruments of production his body uses that we are considering, and the point I wish to impress upon you is the obvious fact that some of these instruments are artificial and the others natural.

Opportunities instead of instruments? Yes, if you wish. We could just as well say that there are two kinds of opportunity for civilized production, and therefore for social service, and that these are artificial opportunities and natural opportunities. But don't go off with the notion that they can be utilized independently. They must be used together. There is no alternative. Natural oppor-

tunities or instruments, without the artificial, may serve the primitive life but not the civilized; and the artificial without the natural are unthinkable under any circumstances. Social service, let me admonish you, is a phenomenon of the co-operative utilization of artificial and natural opportunities or instruments of production. To the extent then that access to either class of instruments is obstructed, to that extent the social service mechanism is fundamentally deranged; to that extent the circles of trade are thrown out of gear; to that extent the grim absurdity of supply of service vainly seeking demand for service in a social service market which exists for the exchange of service for service, and at times when suffering is intense for need of the very service which vainly offers, is increased in its dimensions and magnified in its grim absurdity; to that extent our nature-defying contrasts of idle rich and industrious poor are sharply defined and made elements of social danger.

That access to both is obstructed, we shall agree, I think, if we discuss access to the instruments or opportunities for production, artificial and natural, as the fundamental requisite of social service.