CHAPTER XIII.

Artificial Instruments of Social Service.

At our last interview we were intending to speak a little more specifically, Doctor, about artificial instruments of social service as distinguished from natural instruments. Certainly, I allude to the entire class, to all the artificial instruments of social service, including artificial materials as well as tools—that is, to all the materials and tools of production and distribution that are shaped by human activity. "Distribution"? yes, I am now using this word in the sense of transportation, sale, delivery, and not in the sense of division of profits. I have said, you will remember, that artificial instruments, while not necessary as a condition of producing consumable things, are absolutely so as part of the process. Think a moment, Doctor, of the absolute necessity, as part of the productive process, of those artificial instruments, including artificial materials—"capital," as Professor Rutley would have called the whole thing,—think of the impossibility of getting along in a human way without them.

Did it ever occur to you that they are absolutely necessary to human life? Yes, to any kind of human life, even to solitary human life. Animals, mere animals, may live without artificial instruments; but man cannot do so long, without falling to the level of mere animals. He would have to go naked, for clothing cannot be made without artificial instuments. He would often have to go hungry, for food cannot be cultivated or stored

without them. He could not even get water to drink except as he waded into a river or crawled upon his belly to the edge of a brook or a spring and lapped it like a dog or sucked it up like a horse or a cow. As for housing, he would have to roost upon tree branches, or sleep under the open sky, or hide in natural caves; for no artificial shelter is possible without artificial instruments. The instruments may be crude enough, but instruments there must be and artificial at that. How long do you think it would take to turn us all into filthy brutes, if artificial instruments in aid of the satisfaction of our natural wants were "taboo"? Don't you think that two or three generations would do it for us, quite disgustingly if not quite completely?

Social service would be almost altogether out of the question from the word go. One couldn't carry water to another without a vessel, which would be an instrument in some degree artificial; and while a few interchanges might be possible—a handful of berries or nuts or roots literally carried in the hand, or a chunk of edible flesh, if you choose to regard those things as lacking in the artificial quality, which in strictness they certainly would not be—yet the very limited possibilities and their attendant difficulties would be likely to discourage even such simple interchanges as might be feasible. We never realize, Doctor, how extreme is our need for artificial instruments of production until we think of how we should fare without them. But when we do this, we see—if we are honest with ourselves—that social service is absolutely dependent upon artificial instruments. Even in its simplest operations, it is impossible without artificial instruments of simple form at least, including artificial materials of simple substance; and as it becomes more and more mighty in its powers, and infinitely more complex in its processes, and there-

fore incalculably more useful in its possibilities, social service requires artificial instruments, gigantic in magnitude, delicate in adjustment, and increasingly complex in operation.

The change is so tremendous as to seem like revolution instead of progression, and many historical students are stunned by it. In their mind's eye they see a civilization in which men used artificial instruments, transformed into one in which artificial instruments seem almost literally to use men.

Nor does this social mirage appear to any of us to be as absurdly upsidedown as it really is. You and I look back to our boyhood, Doctor, and behold one of the carpenters we knew, with a kit of tools upon his back ready at the word to serve any of our neighbors who wanted his service, by building or repairing almost anything from a dog house for "Tige" at the front gate, to a bureau for mother's bedroom or a desk for father's den, to say nothing of a huge barn for the cattle. But how is it now? The wide range of work in which the carpenters of our youth were skilled, and which they could do with the handsaw and hammer and chisel and square and auger and gimlet and adze that they carried in their kits, or, if they were thoroughly equipped, in their tool chest the size of a trunk—this wide range of work is now so minutely specialized, the tools are so large and costly, and the methods of operation are so intricately organized, that the worker in wood must seek employment of a master, usually a soulless corporation, in some great factory. He seems no longer to carry on his trade with artificial instruments of social service; they seem indeed to carry on their trade with him.

No, I do not believe that it really is so. I do not believe that the gigantic tools of today really do own the worker of today. No, again, I do not

believe that the owners of the tools exploit the workers, through owning the tools. You may think it a paradox when I say that although the social service workers of today are absolutely dependent for social life upon artificial instruments of production, yet they are not dependent upon the owners of those instruments. But it isn't even a paradox; for a paradox is an apparent contradiction which is not a contradiction in fact, and there is not even an apparent contradiction here. Yes, I will explain.

What if I should say that spiders are absolutely dependent upon spider webs for catching flies, but add that they would not be dependent upon owners of spider webs if there were owners who owned all existing webs? There would be no contradiction in that, would there? You would instantly say that as spiders make all the spider webs they need, their deprivation of existing webs by web-owners could at the worst only inconvenience them temporarily. Well, the principle is the same. Human workers in the social service market, not only need to use artificial instruments of production, but they make them, make them all—not merely *did* make them once, but *do* make them now—make them right along, all the time.

It is just here that the philosophy of our socialistic friend breaks down. In his talks with us he is mighty near right most of the time, even if he doesn't always hold his righteous wrath in polite restraint. I don't mind that, for I believe with Charles Lamb that good temper in argument is not necessarily evidence of sound doctrine. The cynic will support a falsity with good temper, while the earnest man defending a truth gets angry at cynical opposition. So our socialistic friend is often right even in the heat of his anger. But I think he goes off on the wrong scent when he attributes the economic weakness of the "work-

ing class"—as he calls the working interests in the social service market,—to ownership of the artificial instruments of production by the "capitalist class," a term by which he designates parasitic interests. The economic weakness of the working interests is indeed due to their segregation from indispensable instruments of production; but it is not due primarily to their segregation from those which, though indispensable, are artificial. This segregation is a result, not a cause.

How could it possibly be due to that? If the working interests themselves produce all artificial instruments of production, how can the working interests be segregated from them? There are only two ways, Doctor. One is some form or other of the old slavery way of making the master the owner of all the slave produces. But the evil here is the assumption of sovereignty over the man himself; all the rest is incidental to that. The other way is crudely typified by one of the freeman phases of feudalism. While the worker might have been free under feudalism, and nominally the owner of all his products, the landlord owned his indispensable natural instruments of production, and by means of that lever of coercion indirectly confiscated his products. But here the evil was the landlord's ownership of the natural instruments; all the rest was incidental.

This latter coercive force has come down into our own times and country as one of the phases of capitalism. It has come, moreover, with power enormously magnified and subtlety intensely refined. Of that, however, we must speak on another occasion. At present I don't wish to dwell on the subject of natural instruments. What I want is to have you grasp the full function in social service of the artificial ones, and to measure the full scope of the power their monopoly can exercise over the labor interests of the social service mar-

ket. Observe my point. Monopoly of the artificial instruments of production does give coercive economic power, but not in itself; and whether these instruments be the carpenter's little kit of tools of our boyhood, or the great factory of today, makes no difference. My reason for this belief is that the labor interest of the social service market, taking that interest as a whole, not only needs these artificial instruments as vitally as the spider needs his web, but makes and remakes them as truly as the spider makes and remakes webs,—and this continuously.

Yes, no doubt of it; our good friend down the street would say that each spider can make his own web, whereas no modern workingman can make his own artificial instruments of production, or use them alone if he could make them. But the principle of my spider-web illustration would be the same if it took many spiders to make a web. Even then, spiders couldn't be exploited as a whole; and as long as they had a place for their web and were not prevented from co-operating they couldn't be exploited individually. The same is true of workingmen. Given the natural instruments of production, and freedom to trade among themselves—no prevention of co-operation, don't you see—and nobody could exploit the labor of any of them.

I do indeed remember very well how our friend has told us that a worker cut off from the big machine "which works him" and which he can never hope to own, is as helpless as a boy in a boat a thousand miles from shore; that a machine-using animal without machinery is as pitiable an object as a land-using animal without land. And what he says is true. That is, it is true of *a* worker. But it is not true of working interests as a whole. Aye, "working class" as a whole, if you desire for convenience of conversation, provided we do not

allow the word "class" to confuse us. If we adopt it we must stick to the meaning of our socialist friend when he falls back upon Marx and calls it an expression of the entire working force or energy in society regardless of individual functions, or something to that effect. If we use the word "class" we must draw the line at useful work by whomsoever done, and not narrow it so as to include nobody but hired men. And if we say working class instead of working interest, we must recognize that every one is of the working class to the degree that he is a social servitor, even though the rest of him is of the exploiting or parasitic class. I prefer "labor interest" to "labor class"; but with that understanding we'll say "class."

Now it is quite true, as you remind me, that our friend admits that the working class as a whole would not be quite as helpless as the boy in a boat a thousand miles from shore, even if this class were cut off from all existing machinery. He insists, however, that the workers would be at great inconvenience; and I agree with him, although I don't think the inconvenience would continue as long as he does. In my prophetic vision the grinding inconvenience could last but a few months, and the social service market would be better equipped with artificial instruments after a decade than it is now. Look at San Francisco after the earthquake, at Chicago after the fire, at Galveston after the flood; and remember that the labor class —that is, the labor interests of society—did it all.

Our friend's prophetic vision looks at this prospect through the other end of the opera glass. Yet he does admit that before very long the labor class would replace all the artificial instruments we now have, with as good or better ones, even if it were so completely cut off from those that exist as to be obliged to dig the next minerals with fingers and to cut the next sticks with flints. So far we

agree. And I reckon that if it came down to brass tacks he and I would also agree that if the labor class or interest were cut off from all existing artificial instruments, it wouldn't be necessary to replace many of them except as they wore out. For if labor were cut off from them they would go to waste, and with that prospect their owners would make pretty liberal labor terms. Don't you think they would probably give to the labor class its full earnings just for the sake of having the machines used so as to pay for themselves?

Why, Doctor, imagine what would happen if a new continent were to spring up over night out in the Atlantic, say fifty miles from the coast. Ah, yes, there is no difficulty in imagining what would happen if our present land laws were to apply. Every fellow that could get a boat would rush over and stake out a big claim, so as to have the power of imposing terms upon labor. Every body would try to be a landlord on this new continent. Everybody would go over to exploit laborers, not to do labor. But suppose that in some way it were fixed so that nobody could have any more of that continent than he actually put to the best and fullest use. That would discourage the land grabbers, wouldn't it? And if it were a fertile continent, this new continent out in the Atlantic, workers would go over there in droves and work co-operatively for themselves. You ask how they would get there! Do you suppose that great masses of men, including those who know how to cut timber and to build boats, would be at any serious difficulty in crossing that fifty miles of water, if after they got there they were to be subject to no exactions from land-grabbing "sooners"? You may bet your boots they would get there. And what would they do for capital after getting there? Make it, of course. An army of men will soon make all necessary capital if you give them access

to the raw material. Look at your diagrams again, Doctor. Don't you see that Human Activity with Natural Instruments produces everything, including Artificial Instruments?

But, Doctor, the real joke of the thing is this, that there might be no migration at all to that new continent—not for the purpose, at any rate, of getting where you could keep all your own earnings. For the very fact that there was such a place, so easily accessible and so inviting to all energetic workingmen, would put this old continent into competition for workers. The New Continent would say, almost in words: "Come over here, boys, and work, and no one shall fleece you." And how do you suppose the Old Continent would respond? Almost in words, also, wouldn't it say: "Stay here, boys, and you shall hereafter keep all you earn." And if the New Continent called back, "Come over here and you shall own all the capital you create," wouldn't the old Continent reply: "Stay here and you shall not only own all the capital you create but you shall have the use of all the old capital to create it with."

I tell you, Doctor, there is no coercive power to the monoply of capital except as it is derived from the monopoly of land. Put free land into competition with monopolized land, and monopoly of capital would disappear. But with monopoly of land, monopoly of capital is as destructive to labor interests as our socialistic friend says it is.

He doesn't look at the matter as I do, but I think him mistaken. Suppose we summarize his point. Doesn't it amount to this: That the labor class uses machinery; the labor class is dependent upon machinery; the labor class produces and maintains machinery; the labor class has been despoiled of the machinery it has produced in the past, and is being thereby despoiled of the machinery it does produce in the present. While he admits that the

labor class could reproduce the machinery of which it has been despoiled, he seems to admit it as an academic theory only, and to deny it as a practical possibility of capitalistic social life. He appears to think that the labor class would not be patiently cohesive long enough to pass through the period of reconstruction successfully. At any rate I so understand him.

Now of the labor class as a group of distinguishable or classifiable persons our friend's conclusion might be true. But of the labor interest as a social service force, I don't think it is true. Our friend ignores the pressure of those natural laws of social service which you and I have been over and accepted. Let us review them in the light of his sociological doubts. Do you recall the first of those laws, our "sign of the thumb"? It reminds us that men seek to satisfy their desires with the least exertion—the social service law of the line of least resistance. Then the "sign of the index finger": the direction of the demand for service determines the character of the supply of service—the equation of supply and demand, mind you. Next, the "middle finger": every one who works, virtually produces what he buys with his work. Next, the "sign of the third finger": mutuality of competition, if unobstructed, gives his full earnings to each worker. Pursuant to those natural laws of social service, Doctor, wouldn't the labor interests of society get and keep the artificial instruments of production they produced, immediately upon the removal of the fundamental obstructions to the free operation of those laws?—upon the removal of obstructions to trade and of interferences with access to land? And wouldn't every worker get about in proportion to his contribution of work?

Since everybody seeks to satisfy his wants with the least exertion, the labor interests would surely

have, as indeed they have already, a common impulse to utilize the easiest possible modes of production and to secure the largest possible share therein.

Since this impulse regulates demand and supply in the social service market, an increase in the supply of artificial instruments would instantly follow any attempt at monopolizing the existing supply, and thereby lessen the monopoly of all, until the point of no monopoly had been reached.

Since every one who works produces in effect what he buys with his work, acquiring what he works for in exchange for what he works at, every worker wanting an interest in the gigantic artificial instruments of production would not only in effect produce, but would retain, an interest in so much of such instruments as he might need to prevent his being cut off from access to artificial tools of production.

And inasmuch as mutual competition gives full earnings to each worker, maintaining an equilibrium at which each gets of what he wants the equivalent of what he produces, no worker would be underpaid.

Operating freely together these natural laws of capitalism—the essence of which is free contract on a basis of contractual equity—would secure to the labor interest or class, what our friend hopes to secure to it only by abolishing capitalism or "evoluting" out of it. It would do it easier, I am sure; and better, much better, I think.

The reason this much to be desired result is not already experienced, Doctor, is because those natural laws of capitalism are not allowed to work freely. Reflect upon it and I think you will agree with me. Conventional laws and social institutions with reference to property, have placed obstructions in the way of the free operation of those natural laws. Among the obstructions are a

variety of conventional laws that prevent mutuality of competition, thereby unbalancing supply and demand and making service coercive instead of cooperative. This alone would put the labor interest, the labor class, if you please, at a deadly disadvantage. But other conventional laws and institutions are even more fundamental in their evil operation.

In the last analysis all obstructions to the free operation of these natural laws spring from governmental power. International commerce is burdened with tariffs; domestic production and commerce are burdened with taxes levied in proportion to the expenditures of productive energy; inventions are monopolized on the one hand by means of patent laws, which forbid their production, and discouraged on the other by the operation of those patents, which interfere with the production of kindred yet different inventions—and especially with improvements upon patented inventions. But the misuse of governmental power that is fundamental and all inclusive in its obstruction to the operation of natural laws of social service, is that misuse of this power which makes private monopoly of the natural instruments of production. It is to the power of this monopoly that the monopoly of artificial instruments is traceable, and of that power I shall ask you to think with me when we meet again.