

Emerson on Trade

AT the end of his comments, in the July *Harper's*, on Professor Hayek's book, "The Road to Serfdom," Mr. G. Hartley Grattan says, paraphrasing Emerson, "It does not contain the bait that traps my intellect." Mr. Grattan is consistent in believing that monopoly is the evil to be remedied, whether it be exercised by Government or combinations of business men. He does not appear to regard free trade as either urgent or popular. The principle of equal freedom in the economic realm remains, nevertheless, the probable price of peace. Interference in the struggle for existence as it functions in the production and exchange of the necessities of mankind is a potent cause of conflict and disaster. That the importance of this subject cannot be exaggerated was understood by Emerson, who wrote, in the early pages of his *Journal*:

"Trade was always in the world, and, indeed, to judge hastily, we might well deem trade to have been the purpose for which the world was created. It is the cause, the support and the object of all government. Without it, men would roam the wilderness alone, and never meet in the kind conventions of social life.

"Who is he that causes this busy stir, this mighty and laborious accommodation of the world to men's wants? Who is he that plants care like a canker at men's hearts, and furrows their brows with thrifty calculations? that makes money for his instrument, and therewith sets men's passions in ferment and their faculties in action, unites them together in the clamorous streets and arrays them against each other in war? It is Trade—Trade, which is the mover of the nations and the pillar whereon the fortunes of life hang.

"All else is subordinate. Tear down, if you will, the temples of Religion, the museums of Art, the laboratories of Science, the libraries of Learning—and the regret excited among man-

kind would be cold, alas! and faint;—a few would be found, a few enthusiasts in secret places to mourn over their ruins;—but destroy the temples of Trade, your stores, your wharves and your floating castles on the deep; restore to the earth the silver and gold which was dug out thence to serve *his* purpose;—and you shall hear an outcry from the ends of the earth. Society would stand still, and men return howling to the forests and caves, which would now be the grave, as they were once the cradle, of the human race."

The plight of the civilian populations of the war-swept areas of the world, where the normal currents of trade have been arrested, staggers the imagination. The distress of racked and ruined survivors, after years of indescribable misery and loss amidst the hell of war, warns us not to regard Emerson's words as a mere rhetorical flourish. Still lower depths may be reached if we continue to trust to violence instead of economic justice in the attempt to reconstitute world relationships.

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