

1945

OUR SOCIAL PROBLEMS

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FIFTY years ago, the top soil layer in the states of Missouri and Kansas was nearly six feet thick. It was the accumulation of centuries of work on the part of nature. Five years ago that soil layer had dwindled to less than six inches, in many places less than three, and in some had entirely vanished. What is true of our Middle West is like wise true of our eastern states. Fifty years ago we had good arable soil for cultivation, and the land knew the earth worm and the natural soil bacteria. The crops in those days may not have been as peerless in their uniformity and size, for farm products were not considered factory made as we consider them today, but they were hardy and less sensitive to rusts, blights and parasitic insect pests.

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Today our top soil has in many cases been abused. Where once the earth was turned and worms exposed we now find clay that will give support only to weeds. Where nature enriched the soil we now find farm tractors, plowing, and depositing a bit of nitrate with each kernel of corn. Land that was rotated and refertilized by animal products and again allowed to fallow is now being pressed and forced into cultivation by artificial manures and fertilizers. The vitality and strength that came with the earth worm and soil flora is now being artificially preserved by sprays, not one or two a season but six, eight and ten for one crop. These sprays are frequently poisonous substances to all life, including human life, and many astute agronomists, entomologists and physicians are fearful of the consequences of these insect lead and arsenic sprays on the nerve and brain tissue of mankind in years to come.

We know that the most effective sprays are cumulative poisons in the human organism, that they may be deposited in the central nervous system and that irreparable damage may result to great masses of our people. Can we make our soils and farms into factories with impunity? Let us heed the warning of the Cedars of Lebanon. Where once fine forests of cedar and pine preserved for the Bible lands moisture and arable lands, the greed and wasteful methods of our progenitors in wasting the forests precipitated soil erosion and a now all but desert country. Where formerly great

populations flourished, the soil will now support but a handful of that number. And what is true of the man made deserts of Biblical lands is equally true of great sections of India and China, and America.

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The significant thing is not that we are just turning our farms into factories, a thing which nature will not tolerate, but rather that we have, by an ever-increasing tempo, been converting men and women into machines who feed machines, creatures who for want of an opportunity must do repetitive movements day after day and year after year; who have no broad economic base to sustain them, and have no moral satisfaction in seeing a finished article they themselves completed. Our forcing production by providing music while they work, is only a sedative to nervous systems that need the struggle of creating and fashioning to survive.

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In our march toward concentration we have not only sterilized our soil so that we must artificially fertilize in order that we may grow, then spray that we may preserve, but in our society we must provide the same artificial stimulants, bribes, and rewards to keep men from losing heart in the conveyor procedures that we adopt, and then make them artificial eco-

conomic conditions for compensations they have lost in being stripped of their crafts and creative abilities.

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We continually point to the man who has climbed head and shoulders above his fellows and use him as an inspiration to follow, but we are prone to forget that it is easy to step aboard the train as it is just commencing to start, but when once in motion and gaining speed all our running will avail us nothing.

So it is with society. Those who are in the key positions of concentration, whether in our giant chemical corporations, our utilities or our great farm factories, find the going easy, but for the average American the train is moving ever faster, and the risks of catching the flying step treble with each moment.

War, one of our methods of forcing production, has opened our throttle wide in our race for concentration. Now more than ever we have the great industries on the one hand and on the other labor begging for a chance to compete with itself for a living. We have labor czars, kings and barons who have the welfare of thousands and millions in their hands.

There is a wrong in existing social conditions, and until we are willing to face that wrong we are going to suffer in ever widening and deepening depressions of social discord.