

CHAPTER XI.

THE WORLD'S WEALTH INSUFFICIENT TO MAKE ALL MEN RICH.

Fear of poverty in old age is a specter haunting the great majority of wage-workers. They see all about them old men and women who are living in want, and suffering for the necessaries of life. Neither spendthrifts nor guzzlers, yet they drop into soon-to-be-forgotten graves from diseases having their rise in the fact that nourishing food has been lacking. One is apt to think or speak of the occupants of the poor-house as social misfits, yet many of them have, until late in life, fitted fairly well into society, and have only become paupers when approaching their three score and tenth birthday.

No wonder the average workingman, when he begins to think of these things, stands appalled at the picture presented. He is told to be economical, to lay aside something for a rainy day, to look out for chances to invest his savings, to in a small way become a capitalist, and to be able to clip his coupons with the best of them. So one buys a home, on the installment plan; another joins a building society; a third puts his few dollars into a promising mine; while a fourth, being of a timid disposition, places his money in a savings bank, or takes out an endowment insurance that is to give him it all back in ten or twenty or more years.

I have in mind a friend of mine who bought a house on the installment plan. He had it half paid for, when the panic threw him out of steady employment, and sickness took all he had, and left him in debt. Another, who joined a building society, paid in his monthly assessments for seven years only to share in a small

dividend—made by the receiver. It was all he got. A third bought mining stock—and lost; a fourth was lucky enough to withdraw his money from a savings bank only a few months before it was wrecked, and unluckily buy a lot, on boom prices, which a few years later he sold for a song. The insurance company patronized by another failed. Thus all these efforts to escape poverty only brought poverty.

As to going into business, with the record of 98 per cent of failures, there is little encouragement in that direction. It is not to be wondered at, then, that the wage-worker should grasp at the socialistic scheme that promises to put him on the pension list on his fiftieth or sixtieth birthday, and tells him, in effect, that society will hereafter take care of him and permit him to live in the way congenial to his tastes. Individually I think there is a better method than old age pensions by the government, but as between present conditions and what socialism offers, the average wage-worker would be foolish if he did not choose the latter.

There must be some way out of this labyrinth of shattered hopes and lost opportunities. While the theory of saving is admirable, its application is difficult if not impossible to the great majority. And it is the great majority that the theory and practice must fit, else it is of little value. For if only a few can be benefited by saving, it is no better than a lottery, and the throw of the dice is as good a way of winning a fortune as pursuing an industrious and wealth-producing calling.

Wm. L. Holmes, of Detroit, has told how he has succeeded in becoming wealthy. "My idea is to develop natural resources," he says to a newspaper, "so abundantly spread on every side." So he goes over to Kansas and finds gas, limestone and shale, and he capitalizes a company at \$1,500,000 to make cement, and the thing is done. His story is remarkable, starting, as he did, as a book agent, but one is excusable for doubting whether he really did make \$35,000 in

seven years selling books! Wouldn't it have been as well to mention his connection with the Detroit Telephone Company, which was sold to the Bell corporation, while those who placed their savings in the stock are not yet wealthy? In so far as Mr. Holmes has solved the problem of poverty by being an actual wealth-producer—for the manufacture of cement is an honorable calling—he is to be commended. But even if they had the capital, how many could do this? All could not get rich by this method, because there is a limit to capitalizing industries.

The world's wealth is insufficient to allow all to become rich, as that word is understood. The property in the United States averages but little over \$1,200 per capita, and the increase of wealth is not over 5 per cent per annum. So that if all had equal opportunities, and were equally competent to take advantage of them—taking it for granted that all special privileges were abolished—the average family would be still far from any such income as one occasionally reads of in the papers, but scarcely believes.

Poverty is not the natural state of man. Nature is bountiful, and provides an abundance for man's comfort and enjoyment. Since the beginning the seasons have not ceased to come in regular order, and soil and sea need but to be appealed to with diligence and intelligence to return ample reward for the labor expended. But between man and nature there have ever been erected artificial barriers which keep the two separate. Not that these barriers are insurmountable. Were this so, all would starve together. Yet it has been made difficult for man to reach the soil to cultivate it, for man to exchange his products with others, for man to do those things with the least effort that will bring him the greatest reward. As already stated, while there is not enough wealth in the world to make every worker rich, there is sufficient natural opportunities favorably situated which, if utilized, would give every man a competence.

No equal division of the present wealth of the world can be made. Such a thing is neither desirable nor possible. It is not desirable, for it would give to some unearned wealth, and take from others what had been earned. It is impossible, because the moral sentiment of the people will rebel against any such procedure. And sentiment is stronger, when aroused, than any other of man's endowments.

What is needed to abolish both poverty and the fear of poverty, so far as may be, is to put all men on an industrial equality. Not that all will create wealth equally. There are degrees of intelligence, of industry, and of perseverance. The "hustle" that is in one may not be in another, and the tide in the affairs of men that in the course of a lifetime is apt to come to all, will not be taken advantage of at its flood by all. Some will start too soon, others too late. And in either case the reward will not be as great as to those who either from accident or from having greater perceptive faculties start and stop at the right moment.

With all on an equality as regards the opportunity to create wealth, the full development of the wealth-creating faculty will marvelously increase the world's products. The poor will always be with us, no matter how closely man attempts to follow the laws of nature. But with free access to nature allowed, in no community will there be seen the loathsome, degrading, brutalizing, disease-breeding poverty, which now shames the boasted civilization of the twentieth century.

To put all men on an equality requires the abolishing of special privileges, the municipalizing and nationalizing of public functions, and such other legislation as will destroy speculation in land. How these reforms may be brought about, and their far-reaching consequences, are great problems, and their discussion will be left for future consideration.