
RAILWAY MAGNATES

This century has produced in America a class of men called, in general parlance, railway magnates. As a rule they have been men of great intelligence, sound judgment, and tremendous activity; and they have amassed enormous fortunes. Their posterity should have lived for generations; but already we see many signs of decay. In some cases this dissolution begins in the life of the father, and in nearly all cases it completes its work before the end of the second generation.

What is the reason? Many special explanations may be made, but at the bottom of it all is the reactionary effect of human conduct. A moral leprosy pulls them to pieces.

These railway men, when they started out, may not have really meant to do wrong. They went with what seemed to be the currents of the times. They considered it legitimate to get all they possibly could from the public,

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and give as little as possible in return. This rule of conduct is enough to destroy any man; but it is in harmony with the prevailing notion of "business." To get and to keep, no matter how, is the mark of the shrewd business man. Thus these men soon learned to get something for nothing.

At this point the poison first entered their lives. Having once succeeded by the easy path, naturally it was tried again; they were drawn on farther and farther, until it became the beaten path. Their projects involved not only unjust dealing, extortion, and oppression, but in time the bribing of legislatures and city councils, the debauching of officials, the unjust control of courts, and the defeat of justice. Gradually came lowering of standards and sneering at morals. It was the temporary success of might, of cunning, of fraud, and of wrong. But the microbes of death entered at every pore.

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These railway officials formed all sorts of wheels within wheels, to rob their own corporations by means of favored freight companies, and other private schemes. They entered all sorts of combines and conspiracies to boom stocks dishonestly and rob the public, and to depress stocks dishonestly, and thus rob their own stockholders for whom they were acting as trustees.

The first flush of this poison produced a false prosperity. These men built great houses, they owned fine yachts and fast horses, and they lived in regal style. But this fever period soon subsided, and then the death-dealing work of the poison began and the slime of injustice destroyed them.

Viewed from the standpoint of a moral and happy life, the lives of these men were failures. Even in the high tide of their prosperity, they could not have been truly happy. Their pleasures became more and more sensual, with a

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constant tendency toward the brute level. Some of them, in the beginning of their careers, no doubt had a finer side to their natures, and were capable of higher enjoyments; but gradually their natures changed until they ceased to be either loving or lovable, and by degrees all that makes life worth the living was lost to them. The reactionary effect of their ill conduct deadened all that was noble in their natures. The table gourmand is coarse and vulgar, and repulsive to refined people; so the property gourmand becomes coarse, hard, vulgar, and attaches to himself the obsequious, the flunkies, and the hangers-on. He cannot attract noble manhood or womanhood.