

## A STREET-CAR ECONOMIST

(For the Review)

By R. B.

"We've got to have trusts and big moneyed men to carry on the business of this country, and the control of large wealth naturally carries with it privileges and responsibilities. You choose to call the people who control the large units of capital the Privileged classes; I choose to call them the Responsible classes. But call them what you will, they are a necessity to modern production, production on a grand, and therefore, on an economic scale."

He stated it rather well, I thought, so I turned in my seat in the jolting street-car to catch the reply of the low-voiced man who sat on the seat beside him just to my rear.

"No one, I think," replied his seat-mate, "disputes the fact that concentration of capital is necessary to efficient production. The manner of such concentration, however, and the control thereof to secure a maximum of general welfare are the points upon which we seem to differ.

'Ill fares the land to hast'ning ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates and men decay.' "

he quoted.

"Yes, returned the other, " poets are sentimentalists, necessarily so, but business can't be based on sentiment. Look at the facts. The Standard Oil Company is in control of the largest aggregation of capital in America, and we have it to thank it for countless lessons in economic production, labor-saving inventions, and the most perfect business organization in the world."

"We have it to thank, also," interposed the other, "for lessons in cruelty, oppression, legislative corruption, debauchery of the judiciary, assassinations apparently unpunishable in the courts, subsidized pulpits and educational institutions, and wretched and disgusting philanthropy. However, consider this fact: England and the United States are the countries in the world to-day where privilege is most rampant and unhindered; Germany is the country where privilege is under the strictest control. Is the industrial organization of the United States and England at all comparable in efficiency to the industrial organization of Germany?"

They were getting warmed up.

The last speaker then proceeded in a quieter tone:

"No, if the acquisition of wealth beyond that which is really earned inspired in man a whole-souled devotion to the race, begat in him a passionate kindness for his fellows, quickened his social perceptions, cleared his vision of the ultimate good—if the possession of expanding power over others

acted in this particular way, the argument for concentration (irrespective of the manner of concentration) as against diffusion of wealth would rest upon surer footing.

"But what really happens? From the crowded harems of Solomon down to the "Corsair" of Morgan, the vast accumulations of Privilege have chiefly found vent upon and watered those evil areas productive of luxuries and tyrannies which are poisonous and at last fatal to the moral nature of the men so privileged. All down the ages, Privilege has fruited in vain-glorious show, pretensions to unique and exclusive divinity, luxuriousness and other anti-social instincts. Proverbs are saturated with this thought, religions permeated with it. It is an axiom of democracy."

"But the luxuries of the rich are supplied by workers—they are paid for their work—they are given employment—wealth is thus diffused."

"Now, I wish you hadn't said that. Why even the university economists, the very last people on earth to learn anything at all, have long ago given up that contention. Solomon gave three thousand concubines employment, so the good book says. How were they fed and clothed and entertained? Why with wealth which old Solomon extracted from the producers of such goods. What did they contribute to the sum of goods produced in Solomon's kingdom? Nothing. Their support was manifestly a charge upon production, a burden. And so it is today with the suppliers of luxuries to the rich. They are withdrawn from productive employment and constitute an additional burden upon those who do produce the useful things.

"Why look right here in Texas. The profits in the cattle-business have shortly sextupled. Yearlings sell for \$35 per head, and yet the cow-boys, the actual producers of cattle, are still paid but \$30 per month and keep, as they were a few years ago when yearlings sold for \$35 per dozen. Special Privilege, in this case, is derived from monopoly of vast tracts of cattle-producing land. Ride up now to a ranch home, and ten to one you will find it to be either a cowboy-hut or foreman's home. Where are our old time productive cowmen? Why, they are transformed into cattle-kings and you find them in elaborate urban homes surrounded by servants; indulging in expensive automobiles, and luxuriating in tourist-hotels on the Gulf. You find them, in short, everywhere except on their ranches and engaged in about every activity except productive activity. And our cattle-kings are amateurs in the art of useful living compared with the older privileged classes of the East. I take the example of a privileged class nearest at hand which happens, indeed, to be about the cleanest and sanest of the privileged classes of America."

"Well," said the defender of privilege, "you've talked me to my corner, not to say, into my corner." He rang the bell and left the car.

"But what would you do about all this," I asked, anxious to here this expositor to the end.

"Destroy every vestige of privilege," he said emphatically.

"But you would have to destroy many men, then, of great natural endowment, privileged by Nature, so to speak."

"Equality is the greatest and most inspiring ideal which the thinkers of this age can conceive of. If we destroy man-made privileges, and go on propagating the race for a few centuries under conditions of absolute equality of opportunity, God, or Nature, or whatever you want to call it, will take care of the result. Scientific breeders of animals will tell you that inequalities of natural endowment will tend to disappear under conditions of equal opportunity. Be that as it may, it is clear to me that the abolition of all privileges makes for a happier human race. But to get back to the point I started arguing about, namely, the correct theory of the control of wealth, my point of view may be summarized thus:

"Man develops anti-social instincts to keep pace with the increase of his unrestricted control of wealth, thus giving no guarantee that expanding economic power will be used by him to further the welfare of the general public. Concentration of wealth for productive purposes may be effected by cooperation, by legitimate profits of trade, by collection of taxes, the concentration of the same by Special Privilege being about the worst way, since wealth is thus brought together independent of the demands of the general public, and control thereof being consequently autocratic. A river is an accumulation of minute streams, and great productive enterprises often represent confluence of the tiny rivulets of penny-purchases. Diffused control of wealth is better than autocratic control; economic or natural concentration is better than artificial concentration. Artificial concentration and autocratic control burdens one class with the fardels of necessitous defense and useless luxuries, leaving the mass to grunt and sweat out a poorer life; while natural concentration and democratic control eases the yoke and lightens the burdens of the producers, at the same time repressing anti-social instincts by turning the energies and abilities of all into productive channels."

As I reached my corner and swung off the car, a man across the aisle, as I saw through the window, had engaged our iconoclast in a further dispute.

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No GOVERNMENT can possibly prevent wrong doing, because the Kingdom of Heaven is within. The most that governments can do is to magnify and develop the good there is in humanity and minimize the effects of the evil. It absolutely cannot make men better and it may lead them to be worse if it interferes with the growth of the kingdom within.—JAMES BELLANGEE.

THE most democratic and the most autocratic of all governments is the Divine Government. Its democracy makes every individual responsible and its autocracy consists in the immutable conditions under which the individual must act—JAMES BELLANGEE.