

THE DANGEROUS CLASSES IN SOCIETY.

An address delivered by Ernest H. Crosby at the New York State Conference of Religion, on November 21, 1900, in the city of New York. This address was reprinted from the stenographer's notes in response to various requests for copies.

If I were a detective and were asked by my chief to apprehend the ring-leaders of the dangerous classes in the republic I would not go to the Tenderloin district; I would not go to the Bowery or the East side; I would not go to the almshouse or the insane asylum, or Blackwell's island. I would not even go to police headquarters. I think I should station myself, or should have stationed myself, at the door of the chamber of commerce dinner last night. Or, still better, I think I should have put myself on the curbstone, two weeks ago, at the sound money parade. I believe I should have had an opportunity there of finding at least some of the men, who, quite innocently and ignorantly, I assume, are really the leaders of the classes that are most dangerous in a republic. I take it, as the other speakers have this evening, that the dangerous classes in a republic are those that are dangerous to the republic. Lunatics and paupers and ordinary criminals are dangerous in all kinds of nations, and not very dangerous at that. I do not know whether it ever occurred to you, but an ordinary crime is almost as good as a sermon. It shocks everybody. It makes them really better. I know when I see a man humpbacked and bent over it always makes me stand up straighter, take in a good breath and try to have a better figure than I had before. You read about an ordinary, vile murder. It is the best kind of sermon against murder that could be preached. The crimes dangerous to a republic or any other country are those which the great mass of people applaud. Those are the dangerous crimes.

Now, what is the danger to the republic? You have been told already, in the words of that most conservative man, in many ways, at any rate, Prof. Sumner, of Yale college. It is the conflict of plutocracy with democracy. The danger to this country is plutocracy. I do not think we feel that fact as deeply as we should. I have got some figures here—only a few—from Dr. Spahr's book on "The Distribution of Wealth." One per cent. of the families in this country own more than half of the wealth. Suppose Benjamin Franklin were here to-night, or Thomas Jefferson, and we were told that

What would we expect to hear from him? Is that no danger to the republic? Seven-eighths of the families in this country (think what a mass that is!) hold only one-eighth of the wealth. And I know perfectly well that that condition of things is getting more and more accentuated every year. The showing 20 years ago would have been infinitely better. We know the accumulation of wealth is going on by leaps and bounds. Every year it becomes concentrated in larger sums and in fewer hands. It is not necessary to prove that the poor are growing poorer. I do not suppose that is the fact. The fact is that an aristocracy of extremely powerful and rich people is growing up. Do we want such an aristocracy? Our ancestors did not. They fought in England and in this country for hundreds of years, from the time of King John—perhaps even before that—for the purpose of securing a certain degree of liberty and power and equality for themselves and each individual among themselves. I know some people who argue now that all we want is prosperity. We do not care how it comes. We would like to have it trickling down from the strong box of somebody up above us. I do not believe in that kind of prosperity. I would rather have a dollar a day as a freeman than five dollars a day as anybody else's henchman. That is the true Anglo-Saxon spirit.

Another strange idea that people have got into their minds is that the Anglo-Saxons got their great fame and reputation by taking away the rights of other people. This is not so. They got their great fame by standing up for their own rights. It is only in this way that we can keep up the reputation of the Anglo-Saxon race. As soon as people begin to take away the rights of other people they begin to lose their own. We are in very serious danger of being caught in this vulgar kind of trap. I want to spend a little time to show you that we have some rights that we do not enjoy, that we ought to stand up for quite as vigorously as our ancestors did for theirs.

Let us study a little the methods by which these accumulations of wealth are brought together. In almost every case you will see that they arise from a monopoly created by law; that they are artificial products. I am talking now about perfectly legitimate and successful business. Take the two greatest fortunes here in New York. One is held by a gentleman who received in a single year (if we are to believe an affidavit made by his partner in a suit in which he was engaged)

an income of twenty-five millions. There may be a mistake about that, but it was reported by the papers as contained in an affidavit in a suit brought against him by his partner. That fortune was built up almost entirely by the assistance of the protective tariff. If it had not been for that I doubt if there would be very much fortune there. It is perfectly clear that we simply have created that fortune ourselves by our stupidity and folly.

Take the other greatest fortune here in New York, built up, I suppose—we won't say in the first place—but partially, by the ability to monopolize a natural product, oil. But I believe that was really a minor consideration. I don't believe that was the principal part of it. The real foundation of that fortune was the ability to manipulate the railroad monopoly. You listened to an address last night by Mr. Henry D. Lloyd, who has written a book called "Wealth Against Commonwealth," which ought to be read by every American citizen. Every page has at the foot references to the testimony upon which it is based. Either the Standard Oil company or its predecessor, which built up the original business in some wonderful manner which I confess I do not understand at all, seemed to get complete control of two or three railroads, including the Pennsylvania and New York Central. At that time people went about saying what great and powerful men the Vanderbilts were, and all the time they were completely in the hands of the great oil monopoly, which not only got the railroads to carry their oil free, but made the railroads divide what they received from their competitors and pay half to them because they sent their oil over that road. So the Standard Oil company not only had its oil carried for nothing, but got one-half the price its competitors paid. This may have been perfectly legal and legitimate. I don't know anything about it. But if we had any conception of our rights in railroads chartered by our legislatures, over land which was bought by our authorization, such things would not be possible.

Take the great number of fortunes made in real estate. John Stuart Mill, who certainly was not a radical, called attention to the evil of allowing private individuals to take the unearned increment of land to themselves. It is my own belief that the land monopoly is responsible for a great many of the iniquities in society to-day. I am always being told that I am a great deal

too progressive and too radical, because I say that every child born into this country ought to have some share in the land that God made. But I am only going as far as Moses did. Moses provided that every Israelitish child who was born should have a right in the land in which he was born. That seems to me a wise and sensible provision, and we ought to find some way by which we could do the same thing ourselves. If we did, people would not be in possession of large fortunes simply because they happened to own a frog pond along Broadway or Fifth avenue. It seems a foolish way of accumulating wealth—foolish for those who don't do it.

Take the matter of breweries. All brewers are rich. None of them ever fail. I believe that brewing differs from every other industry in the country in that respect, and the reason is the internal revenue law. They are hedged around by the expenses which have to be incurred by any competitor for the purpose of competing with them in the matter of internal revenue, which makes it impossible to compete with them at all.

Take the matter of patents. In a certain way the idea of patents is a very good thing. There ought to be some way of rewarding the inventor, although the patent law never does reward the inventor; it rewards somebody who has already cleaned the inventor out. Still the idea is a very good one. But how is it with the telephone monopoly? It ought to have run out a year ago. Why didn't it run out? Why is it that it has some 15 or 20 years more to run? Because some compliant clerk in the patent office failed to put some paper on record, so that the 15 or 20 years never began to run at all until about a year ago. The Bell Telephone company has got the monopoly now for a great many more years. It is a fraud from the word go.

Take a familiar kind of land monopoly, which concerns the use of our public streets. If I had the time I could spend a half hour on that subject alone. The gas companies using our streets charge perfectly extortionate rates. Nobody can compete with them. It is the same with the trolley lines—with this Fourth avenue trolley line that goes by this door; for this part of the line it does not pay anything to anybody under the sun, and for the rest of it very little. I went with others to Albany a couple of years ago to work in favor of the corporation franchise act, which simply requires that these corporations (in-

cluding gas companies, trolley line companies and others) that use our streets should pay on their watered stock—their capital which they have never paid for—should pay the same tax that you and I pay on our personal property. I had not the remotest idea that the bill would ever pass. That is the kind of bill I generally go up about. But I went up to appear before the senate and assembly committee, knowing they wouldn't pay any attention to me. The bill never would have passed if it had not been for Gov. Roosevelt. It was a piece of common decency and honesty, but it never would have passed if it had not been for Gov. Roosevelt and Senator Ford, who took some interest in it. To my mind, it was by far the finest thing that Gov. Roosevelt ever did. I wonder he never talks about it.

Our ancestors made a little trouble 120 years ago about a little tiny tuppenny tax on tea. I don't suppose anybody would have ever felt it in the world. It was almost a ridiculous thing to say anything about. But they did not believe in the principle of taxation without representation. I wonder how long Sam Adams or Benjamin Franklin would have paid five cents for a three-cent ride in one of our street cars and hung on by the strap when they had paid for a seat without trying to get up some kind of an unparliamentary disturbance?

The Metropolitan Traction company has at least eighty millions of watered stock, on which I understand it pays seven per cent.; that is, on a value which we have given them, and for which they never paid a cent. Is not this taxation without representation? It is the same way with the gas companies and other companies.

I remember some years ago looking into the Brooklyn Trolley company. I am not very good on statistics, but you can take what I say as being true in a general way, which is more than you can say of most people. It is not very fresh in my memory, but I think the real value of the company's plant, some years ago, was \$9,000,000, though it was capitalized, I think, at \$25,000,000. Then there was a little one-mile-long company in Montague street, which was capitalized at \$200,000. To this they leased the whole of the rest of the system—I don't know how many miles—but the little Montague street company took the whole. Then they went down to West Virginia and organized a company there, and that company bought these shares, amounting to \$200,000, of the Montague street line, which had already leased all the

other trolley lines of Brooklyn. You don't understand it? I don't understand it myself. It is like the three-card monte game at Coney Island, "Now you see it, and now you don't." You never put your finger on the right card. They wanted to mix up the whole business so that nobody would know how much it cost, in order that they might make 20, 50, 100 per cent. in dividends, and nobody be the wiser. That gives you a little idea of how these things are done. Water is a pretty word. Watered stock. Doesn't that sound nice? The only water about watered stock is the sweat of other people's brows. That is all there is of it. You cannot get money without earning it, unless somebody else earns it without getting it, and all of you pious people who get dividends in the Metropolitan company every three months or every six months are simply, in many cases, taking away the reward of somebody else's labor. You may say: What shall we do about it? But that is the fact. That is the way in which the great monopolistic businesses of our country are built up. For that reason I say the monopolists constitute the really dangerous class in this country. I would like to tell a little story about a trolley company, to show how great monopolists treat the common laboring men. Laboring men have great confidence in legislation. They got a bill passed that no railway company in New York and Brooklyn should exact more than ten hours' work a day from its employes. The trolley lines in Brooklyn, like almost every other line in the city, paid no attention to the law. The men had to work for 11 hours or 11½ hours—it made no difference how long. The employes in Brooklyn determined to test that question and have it perfectly clear. They went before Judge Moore, of the county court in Brooklyn, and said: "See here, we want the directors of this company arrested and fined, because the law says they shan't exact more than ten hours' labor a day from their men, and they are exacting 11 hours' labor from them." Judge Moore rendered a decision in which he ruled the case out on the ground that the company did not exact more than ten hours a day, because the men were at liberty to go anywhere else to work if they wanted to. That was his decision. Do we wonder that there is some feeling against courts and the directors of companies under such circumstances?

There is no end to this taking of the public resources of the state and using them as private property. We have

seen how the Ramapo company tried to get possession of all the rivers and lakes in this state. We have seen a company, in fact, formed to take possession of Niagara falls and use that tremendous power. Once get a corporation to water its stock with Niagara falls, and I don't exactly know where the system is going to end.

How are we going to put an end to the existence of dangers of this kind? Not by punishing people for doing what most of us would do under the same circumstances, but by doing all we can to put before the people a new ideal, and by legislation making it impossible for people to succeed in rolling up wealth in this way. If we could tax the unearned increment out of the land, if we could tax the water out of stock, it seems to me that would be a beginning in the right direction. Far more important, if we could hold up the ideal that to be honest and honorable a man must have only what he earns, and nothing more. If we could preach some such ideal as that, I think we should find that we are advancing in the right direction. Our business ideal now is, Get all you can for nothing. The more you can get for nothing the more successful you are. That should be replaced by the ideal of only getting what we are honestly entitled to. If my work is worth \$50,000 a year, let me have it; but don't make it possible for me to succeed in getting anything outside of that \$50,000. As long as the Wall street ideal, "Grab all you can get," is the national ideal, just so long we are going to have the great problem of the monopolist class and the pauper class. It is not a mere coincidence that Wall street and Tammany Hall are in the same city. The two things go together. Wall street is the principal seat of the disease of making money at the expense of other people. Fourteenth street is nothing but a boil on the surface. It seems more unsightly, but it merely shows that the other thing exists beneath the surface.

Let us do what we can to raise up another ideal. Most of us are too old to undertake to apply it in our own lives; but let us show that we think the proper thing for people to do is to confine themselves to their own earnings, and not make it the great object of their lives to get away the earnings of other people.

Yoder—Why are you studying that work on philosophy?
 Mix—I want to learn if Funston would have gotten more credit if he had captured a criminal.

G. T. E.

She had just hurt her ankle, and waited impatiently for a car. As she climbed aboard she saw that not a seat was unoccupied. Several men were standing, and two had seats. One of these was intoxicated, and she pulled her dress aside with an expression of intense disgust. But the hurt ankle throbbed cruelly, and she turned to the other man, asking timidly:

"Might I have your seat? My ankle—"

He looked up from his paper a moment, then turned back a gruff "No."

She flushed angrily and stepped forward. But the other passenger had taken in the scene and, rising unsteadily, offered his seat with a heavy bow. Then he addressed the gentleman with the paper with a ponderous gravity:

"See 'ere, I'm drunk, but I'll get over it. You're a hog—never get over it."—University of Chicago Weekly.

I believe that there is not a single argument that may be used against women's suffrage, that may not be used against our form of government.—Mrs. Susan Look Avery, in Chicago, April 6.

Self-government cannot be taught to one people by another people. It is something that must be learned by experience.—The Commoner.

Miss Imper—My Uncle Jacob is a gentleman of the old school.

Miss Britt—How nice!

Miss Imper—Yes; but it is unbearable to listen to him when he is upholding the obsolete idea that no man is good enough to rule another man without the other's consent.

G. T. E.

Freddie (who has been brought up with a pianola, rushing frantically upstairs from the drawing-room)—Oh! Mamma, mamma! There's a man downstairs playing the piano with his hands!—Life.

Miss Sympul—Those heathen Boxers in China must be horrible creatures!

Mr. Saylor—They are; but think how much more enterprising they would be if they were Christian Boxers.

G. T. E.

The contrast commonly drawn between idealism and realism is false. The true contrast is between the ideal (which is real and eternal) and the phenomenal (which is unreal and transitory).—Rev. Gustavus Tuckerman.

Some men are so prone to imagine evil that they would find fault with Mr. McKinley if he should proffer the services of Gen. Funston to Great Britain to effect the capture of De Wet.

G. T. E.

"What are you doing?" asked one of his friends who had happened in.

"I am writing my resignation," replied the professor of something or other in the proprietary university.

"What are you doing that for?"

"Because I am going to make a speech this evening in which I shall probably express an independent opinion."—Chicago Tribune.

The Congressman — But are you loyal to the administration?

The Place-Seeker—Most emphatically I am. I indorse even the panegyrics on the Filipino Benedict Arnolds.

G. T. E.

"What kind of paintings did you say they were, Frances?" said a mother to a small daughter who was describing a "view" to which she had been invited.

"They were these impressionless paintings, mamma."—Detroit Free Press.

Weppnere—Noah is entitled to more credit than that which is commonly given him.

Faren—How is that?

Weppnere—He built the ark without the help of a subsidy.

G. T. E.

First Correspondent (in China)—I'm tired of sending word that the situation is critical.

Second Correspondent—So am I. I just cabled that the situation is not un-critical.—Puck.

"Well, I see they are going to have a real naval arch."

"What's the idea of that?"

"Oh, I suppose it's to commemorate the way Dewey has been forgotten."—Life.

Old Friend—And so both of your children are studying professions?

Hostess—Yes, my daughter is in a polytechnic college studying mechan-

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