

Ideals and Shortcomings of Society.



COLONEL WATTERSON'S caustic remarks concerning the "simpering Johnnies and the tough girls that make Sherry's and Delmonico's 'hum,'" who he says have adopted the title "Smart Set" to save themselves "from a more odious description," have created wide discussion in pulpit, press, and as a topic of general conversation, which will undoubtedly be productive of beneficial results. Mrs. Burton Harrison's reply to Watterson in the New York American and Journal of Sept. 21, is in itself a strong arraignment of the class she attempts to defend. She says, "Folly, extravagance, exuberance that passes good form and sometimes decency; faults in abundance may be theirs," and no argument is necessary to prove what is thus conceded. Again she says of the "dwellers in the great houses of New York and Newport: * * * "Some of them are dull respectable people." * * * I hope she does not mean to imply that all respectable people are dull, for if she does, it is an admission of a conviction on her part more serious than Col. Watterson's most scathing charge. Yet I find this blasphemy not merely implied but boldly asserted in a comment by Edgar Saltus, upon the same subject and upon the same page. He says a society composed of people of perfect character "would be duller than the Smart Set," which he describes as the *ne plus ultra* of dullness. This remark indicates that he, as well as the "Smart Set" which he criticizes, is lacking in the realm of the ideal. It shows, rather, a confusion of ideas—a superposing of his own ideal of perfection upon a saint borrowed from the conception of some persecuting Puritan of the seventeenth century. A saint is an ideal of perfection, and dullness is not an attribute of that ideal. To assert that a society composed of saints would be dullness inconceivable, is a dangerous falsehood. What Mr. Saltus evidently means is that a society composed of saints (according to some other man's definition) would be dull companions for a society of saints (according to his own view), or, dull to him, in comparison with society as he finds it. His statement, however, that a person without moral deformity, or a society composed of such, would be inconceivably dull, is too serious a reflection upon the human race and the Creator of the Universe, to pass unchallenged. Not that I intend to pose as the champion of the Author of all things. He needs no defender, nor is the human race, in general, in need of a protector against such calumny. But I criticise the use of such an ill-advised expression, to warn the individual reader that the ideal of character and conduct are contained in the commandment, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father

in heaven is perfect," and that anyone who says that a society living up to that ideal would be inconceivably dull, gives evidence thereby of his own lack of moral perception. And let me say that the ideal contained in the above commandment may be kept in mind and constantly striven for, by any one who desires to attain it, regardless of external circumstances—whether among the rich, or poor, or those who, in material things, are blessed with the fulfillment of the prayer of Agar, "Give me neither poverty nor riches." It is my conviction that among these latter, the normal conditions necessary for the highest development obtain to the greatest degree, and it is for this reason that I advocate the establishment of a just social or industrial order, in which excessive wealth and poverty shall not exist, and in which every man will live by the service which he renders. "He that is chief among you, let him be as he that doth serve."

The time has gone by when a man, who, either in ignorance or hypocrisy, prates about those who attempt by legal process to usurp the birthright of society, and "exercise authority" over men arbitrarily, as "Christian men to whom God in His infinite wisdom has given control of the property interests of the country," can gain an audience among intelligent people. Christianity asserts that such men were called "benefactors" among the Gentiles—"But ye (Christians) *shall not be so*." That is, a man cannot exercise arbitrary authority over his fellow men and be a Christian, no matter how vociferously Mr. Baer may call him one. He must recognize the laws of the Universe or his claim to that title is only a pretense or assumption. And I may add that a man who understands these laws would answer the question of Mr. Arthur M'Ewen, in the paper already quoted,—"*To be rich and to have nothing to do but spend your money—come now, wouldn't you like that yourself?*" with a NO big enough to blot out the entire insinuation which follows. To have money to spend without earning it, is demoralizing to the individual and to society. Integrity is an essential element in ideal character, and is absolutely incompatible with such enormous wealth in the hands of a few individuals as we are familiar with in this beginning of the twentieth century.

The question as to what one would do under the same circumstances, is idle speculation, and of infinitely less importance than the question, How shall just conditions be established? It is not my purpose to answer that question here, further than to say that it is comparatively easy to answer and requires strict honesty. My present purpose is to emphasize the fact that, "A man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," or that the highest ideal of human development can be attained without excessive wealth which involves social injustice, and on

the other hand, cannot be attained with it. While the exploited class needs to learn how with the ballot box "to close its pockets with the button of the law against the fingers of the 'better classes'—who live, as from time immemorial they have lived, by appropriating what others earn," the "appropriating" class needs also to learn to blush with shame that their fingers have been thus engaged. And this must be attained, not through class hatred, but—love,—the realization on the part of both classes, of the meaning of the commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." There is no occasion for any feeling in one class against the other, for both are victims of a system which has been inherited by society from the days of chattel slavery, giving us, as Mr. Abram S. Hewitt says, a "custom of wages" based upon cost of subsistence, and still diverting the product of labor from the possession of the laborer to that of a master, now styled an "employer."

The "employer" is no more responsible for the system than the "employee,"—except, perhaps, from the fact that he has made a practice of lying, consciously or unconsciously, during a political campaign, and telling the "employee" that their "interests were identical," and from the further fact that a larger opportunity should have given him a deeper insight into economic law, and he should therefore have been first to discover the injustice of present conditions, and the remedy for them. But perhaps it is too much to expect that one whose income is increased by "faulty economic conditions" should detect these faulty conditions sooner than one whose income is diminished by them.

The fact remains, whatever the preceding circumstances, that "the evil in the trusts" exists, and in consequence we have the extravagance and insipidity at Newport on the one hand, and on the other hand the spectacle of starving miners striking for a subsistence wage. Both the underpaid miner and the overpaid "Newport pinhead who sits at table with a maudlinly-drunken chimpanzee" are an appalling reflection upon our civilization, and a single stroke of justice will abolish both, for be it known that the extravagance at Newport and elsewhere are the CAUSE of the dearth in the miner's cabin.

How long will the people of inordinate wealth continue to "put their trust in riches" as a means of securing happiness, (which is designated by the founder of Christianity as the "kingdom of heaven"—for really that is what every one is seeking), and though "having ears hear not" the words which come down to them through the centuries—the same which fell unheeded upon the ears of the rich young man of that former time—"ONE THING THOU LACKEST?" Not only are they deaf to those words, but they are also blind to the poverty and ill paid labor

which support their idle extravagance, not to speak of worse social crimes of which these unjust conditions are the cause.

But the fault lies not entirely with them but with society. The government, in the last analysis, was responsible for the tragedy witnessed upon Calvary, and the government to-day permits the injustice which manifests in the multimillionaire and the slum—the same cause produces both effects, and until the public conscience is aroused to realize the enormity of the crime, those who do recognize it must, if they have learned the lesson taught on Calvary, in the same spirit of love repeat the prayer which sprung from that experience—"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." But we can also be witnesses to the truth that the "Swell Set" which Col. Watterson in common with the vast majority of people disapproves, and the slums and ill paid labor which support idle luxury and extravagance—not to add debauchery and crime, which may be mostly traced to the same source—can both be done away by the simple process of abolishing monopoly and substituting just laws for those which now confer special privileges upon the few whereby they live at the expense of the producers of wealth.

To have wealth without earning it, and to earn wealth without having it are both *evils*, and until President Roosevelt learns this fundamental truth, he will seek to find "the evil in the trusts" in vain. When he learns it, to "destroy the evil in the trusts" will be within easy reach, and through the working of just laws, those now "wasting their substance in riotous living" will learn, even as the Prodigal of old, that they have "sinned against heaven," and that this is not life but a waste of life. Thus through the abolition of legalized injustice, will the mission of Christ be fulfilled, that all "may have life more abundantly." It is not possible to create Christians by legislation, but it is possible to legislate so as to make Christian living possible. Under present conditions, a man is compelled to be either "one of the robbers or one of the robbed," or the two combined. Non-dividend-paying capital, of which our public buildings, schools, streets, highways, parks, etc., are an example, is the solution of the "labor problem," and the Census Report shows the average working man's income will be more than doubled by such solution. Moreover, the unearned incomes of those who "live by appropriating what others earn," will cease, and the Scripture will be fulfilled which says, "If any will not work, neither shall he eat." The abolition of slavery may work some temporary hardship to those who have been living by the labor of others, but it will prove a blessing to all—'tis a labor of love.

Horace Mann.

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