

CHAPTER XXII

NEMESIS

MYTHOLOGY

We have no statue to Nemesis in our mythology; indeed, it would be impossible to imagine anyone, in a world of optimists, wasting a moment's thought on such a figure, for it must be admitted that ninety-five per cent of the people believe, no matter how bad times are, that prosperity is around the corner. Still, Nemesis is here, although we have raised no temples to her. The ocean-born daughter of Okeanos seems to have been present in every civilization. Her attributes were, in some respects, those of Zeus, Jupiter, and the God of the Hebrews. With the Greeks she symbolized all those disasters, economic, social and political, which fall upon peoples. Her name and her statue were a warning to evil-doers. The Greeks realized that she had the vision to detect defeat in victory. There seemed to come from her warnings of loss, of something which has passed and can never be regained.

SOOTHSAYERS

Those who imagine that this civilization is proof against decay disregard the warning which is present in the history of the decline of every people that has passed. They seem to be under the impression that inventiveness and machinery or, to use the much-

worn phrase, scientific approach, will enable us to escape what other nations suffered before their fall. There were always, however, optimists in every civilization who took just exactly the same attitude. The soothsayers our universities turn out are no different from those of classical times. No doubt, in Babylon at the time of the rise of Assyria, there were numbers of soothsayers to tell Sennacherib that his policies were sound and that his State was founded upon a rock. They did not tell him that his slaves would welcome the enemy, that his bureaucrats were discouraging producers, and that the internal discontent of his State was a danger which threatened to undermine its alleged stability. In Greece, too, there were many soothsayers, even a few days before the end came, when the freeborn Athenians who were captured as slaves were branded with the stamp of the coat of arms of Athens. Pericles, himself, not only harkened to the voice of his soothsayers, but he had, also, to listen to the demands of the people who asked not only for self-government but a share in the State's revenue. Pericles thought, if disaster could not be averted, at least it could be put off for some time by playing down to the crowd, and the national upheaval of discontented folk was checked by a leveling movement. It was a share-the-wealth scheme. Many abandoned honest work so that they could earn the dicasts' fees and make a living out of the courts. It has been described by the historian as "self government gone mad."

GREECE'S SLAVE STATE

Greece's great riches were the power that increased the envy of the people. Still, with all her fair notions of creating a free State, she, at the same time, built up

a slave State. Athens at the time of her splendor was one of the greatest slave markets of the ancient world. It is said that the slaves numbered four to every freeman. Aristotle pointed out that the reward of a slave was his food, and it has been truly said that the demand for slaves was so great that a system of kidnapping and press-gang work was organized to supply the market. Romaine Paterson says, "a handful of men were governing a nation in chains."

Behind the splendor of Greece there was a world of bitterness and suffering. The populace clamored for doles; men were paid for attending their own assembly; free tickets were issued for the theatre and, no matter how many concessions were made by the State to keep them quiet, the people cried out for more and more, always desiring something new. This was the condition of Athens when her freemen were the parasites of their slaves. Moreover, the State established a vast system of propaganda. Tax collectors roamed the country, searching for hidden wealth and often these tax gatherers were accompanied by garrisons to enforce the fiscal regulations. But Nemesis, from her temple at Sunium seemed to mutter to slave and freeman, ruler and bureaucrat, tax gatherer and soldier, "Beware!"

ROME'S SLAVES

No doubt there were soothsayers in Rome who, although knowing the fate that had overtaken Greece, were ready to tell the people of the Forum that their civilization was proof against decay. Yet there, centuries before the fall, taxation was enforced by torture, social abuses grew as men talked politics, and the rabble waited like beggars on the imperial alms in the form of wheat, wine, oil and pork. The provinces were

milked to death. Rome's slaves built roads, bridges, aqueducts; indeed, they performed the same work that is done by our C. C. C. and W. P. A., but all to no enduring purpose. The producers were ground almost to powder and, as Pliny tells us, great estates ruined Italy, for the great estates were cultivated by slaves.

ALL DUTIES, NO RIGHTS

In all the civilizations of the past, duties were the order of the day. Those who tell us that there can be no rights without duties must be oblivious of what history records. She emphasizes the fact that duties without rights can save no State. Indeed, under the systems of slavery which brought about the downfall of the classical nations, duties were given in lieu of rights. Each culture ended in slavery: all duties but no rights.

Is there one defect in our civilization that was missing in those that brought about the downfall of Greece and Rome? He would be a bold optimist who would say there is no comparison to be made between those of classical days and ours. He would certainly overlook the tremendous fact that, whereas in Greece and Rome the slaves were in chains for long centuries, in our civilization it is not necessary to put the slaves in chains; all the government has to do is to raise a paper fabric which is sufficient to insure, until actual bankruptcy comes, the forced working of the producers. Government paper is, in itself, as effective an instrument for forcing labor to produce as the whip of the slave driver. Still, slaves who are not placed in chains have many advantages that classical slaves had not. In recent months we have had several examples of what might take place in this State when the patience of

industrialists reaches the breaking point. But the invader, so far as Babylon, Greece, and Rome were concerned, was the main aid of the slave. Our slaves have no invader at their gates. This State is singularly well blessed, so far as all possible aggression on the part of invaders is concerned. Yet, there should be some way out of this disastrous condition; there should be some way to save the State from extinction. Perhaps, if it were possible to restore the rights, which were advocated by the man who was instrumental in inculcating the ideas of independence in the minds of our Founding Fathers, something might be done towards emancipating our people; but the restoration of no rights, save those which are basic, will be of the slightest avail. Only the restoration of rights which will insure equal opportunity to use the earth will suffice. Such a proceeding might easily make things worse for a long time, but worse they will be (notwithstanding short periods of better trade), and steadily worse they will grow for long generations, indeed, so long as the paper business of piling up debt keeps the wealth producers too busy to study these affairs in their own interest. Whether it be better to end the wretched business by one fell stroke rather than linger on in misery and suffering, is something to be determined by the people themselves. Yet, no change will avail the workers one jot unless they act in unison, and know that the change to be made is founded upon just economic principles.

What, then, must be done? Liberate all those who are concerned in production, in industry. But how is this to be done? There is only one way, and that is to take those values that are created by the community for the use of government and abolish all taxes that fall upon wealth. The justice of this proposal should be

patent to all thinking people, for it is recognized that land value is created by the community. Therefore, each and every one is heir to that vast estate. Here, we ground such a proposal on the broad base of economic justice, and lay a system in which every man, woman and child has an equal interest.

The administrative branches necessary under such a system, and the methods to be used for choosing the administrators need not be gone into now, for everything will depend upon the nature of public opinion when all economic interests start from equality of opportunity. It has been suggested by dreamers that all the administrative work that would be necessary under such a system would be given voluntarily. But such a question lies so far in the future that we need not waste time in debating it now.

This, however, is the important matter which lies before us: how can we change from this system, which is steadily becoming more and more dangerous to everybody in the community? There is only one thing to be done, and that is contained in the proposal that I have referred to above: to untax industry by abolishing taxes on wealth, and by taking rent, the value of the land itself, apart from improvements, for the use of the people.