

The Myth of Free Enterprise

"FREE ENTERPRISE and the sanctity of contracts are largely responsible for America's growth," writes Roger W. Babson. The words have a familiar, sanctimonious, ex-cathedra sound; they are "safe and sane," possessed of all the proper and conventional qualities. Most responses would be "Amen, Glory to God," but mine is, "Good Lord, deliver us." It is supposed to be the truth and with the unthinking multitude passes as such. But when closely inspected and analyzed, it turns out to be but a prize specimen of high-class bunk, a camouflaged lie.

"Free enterprise" is also largely responsible for many other things not so gladsome and gracious. It is "largely responsible" for the enormous waste of our natural resources for the benefit of a greedy, grasping, covetous few; for the ravenous destruction of our forests, the frenzied waste of our oil and gas resources, for the unparalleled exploitation and depletion of all other valuable mineral resources; waste often almost equalling useful production. It is "largely responsible" for millions of tons of coal being left in mines through hasty, careless, indifferent mining methods, in the search for quick profits regardless of waste or future need; fortunes in culm piles and the other mining wastes; the utter destruction, by incessant, greedy cultivation, of the rich cotton and tobacco lands of the South, with the result that countless thousands of acres are deprived of all fertility and humus, thrown aside, neglected, ruined by erosion.

A few made rich by free enterprise or the destruction of the nation's resources, with the mass of our people helping, at little more than subsistence wages, to destroy their own heritage and the heritage of future generations, that a few might shine in fabulous wealth and splendour, while the masses, thus bereft, are doomed to permanent, increasing helplessness and poverty.

"America's growth." America has not grown. As a land she has been exploited and depleted. Nor has her people, as a whole, grown rich and prosperous. Her land upon which all must live and her resources, from which all must derive their living, are held and controlled by a comparative few. No others have the right to live upon and use the earth except by the permission of these few, and by paying such tribute as may be demanded. These so-called owners

must be the "children of men" to whom the Creator deeded the earth. All the rest of us are but step-children. Our place, our destiny is to be "hewers of wood and drawers of water" for our masters upon whose earth we must live. Here we are on a planet where we have no right to be; strangers and sojourners here for a season, not with the Lord as the Bible declares and as manifestly the Creator intend it to be, but with the landlords whose ways differ greatly from those of the Lord.

Few of us begin to realize "where we are at" economically. In 1926 a reliable government commission reported that fifty-nine per cent of the Nation's wealth was owned and controlled by eight per cent of our people. Since then this concentration of wealth has been going on at a fast and furious rate and it seems probable that this eight per cent of the people now own fully seventy-five per cent of the nation's wealth. But worst of all, the God-given natural resources are monopolized to such an extent that the production of wealth, and the lives and welfare of the people are largely in their hands.

We can dwell on this planet and make use of its resources to supply our needs only by paying tribute to these, our masters. Small chance for us to grow great and rich and prosperous.

Those of us who feel the urge to observe, reflect, and reason, well know that the riches, grandeur, and greatness of this country are due to the benevolence of the Creator in endowing this land with fabulous natural resources, and to the ambition, intelligence, efficiency and skill applied by the people who in the providence of God came to possess and inhabit the land.

"America's growth"—how has she grown? In population? Yes. In riches? Yes. Enormous riches for a cunning, crafty, privileged few. In greater freedom or a higher level of prosperity for all her children? No! Towering riches overlooking deepening cavernous slums of poverty. Stick to the truth. Face the facts. Tell the truth, the whole truth. Take the bitter with the sweet, and your fervid panegyrics to the riches, greatness and glory of our land will be a shade less glowing.

Why should progress be attended with great riches for a few and ever deepening poverty for the masses? This has been the history and fate of all civilizations of all nations in all time. Where wealth

accumulates, why do men decay and nations lose their hope, their strength, and vigor? Why do great riches for the few inevitably mean dire poverty for the many? Why, as wealth becomes more abundant, should hunger and nakedness prevail among the workers who, from the resources and materials freely furnished them by their Creator, produce all wealth? Why should they be poor and in distress at any time? Why does poverty keep pace with, even at times, outrun progress?

Are these statements true? If so, why? What is this fatal disease that has strewn the paths of history with the works of the great nations and civilizations of the past ages and seems to have gained a stranglehold on the great civilizations of our day?

These are the questions which our so-called Christian civilization puts to the sphinx of Fate which, not to be answered and answered correctly, is to be destroyed.

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