

"THOU SHALT NOT STEAL"

"A steel cage on wheels, cunningly wrought by a skilled craftsman and safeguarded by locks of the most complicated design, for the morning's ride of Vinson McLean, America's \$100,000,000 baby, is the latest and most startling novelty which two fond parents at Bar Harbor have adopted to protect their boy from kidnapers;" and "detectives, private watchmen, 30 house servants, and 50 outside retainers are also enlisted in protecting this child marvel from kidnaping." That is one of the news items with which the history of this glorious August week begins.

The news of the week before was enlivened with gay accounts of a bull pup passenger riding from ocean to ocean in a special Pullman car to save him the discomfort and indignity of traveling in the baggage car, a car whose master gets for years of hard work less than the cost of that bull pup's traveling expenses on that one luxurious journey.

Mixed with these news stories of prosperity were news stories of a different kind. There was the man who, gone crazy it may be from loss of a pitifully unremunerative job and with harrowing fears of starvation—at any rate indignant unto death from a sense of injustice, real enough no doubt though wrongly directed—tried to murder a mayor. There were young girls synchronized to the motions of tireless machinery, wearing out their lives at the murderous rate of ten hours a day. There were suicides caused by poverty and fear of poverty; and crimes caused by poverty and fear of poverty—emphasized, perhaps, by a plausible feeling that legality crimes are no worse in morals than the legality privileges that breed hundred million dollar babies and Pullman car pups.

Apologists for things as they are, may ask with a sneer if we would have the rich give all their wealth to the poor. It is a trick question which no intelligent person any longer asks, unless he is dishonest as well as intelligent. We would no more have the rich give all their wealth to the poor—though there is good Christian authority for it, is there not?—than we would have them give any part of it to the poor, as they piously and boastfully do through their charity donations.

Those contrasts raise a question, not of "dividing up" with the poor, but of *stealing* from the poor.

The over rich are thieves. It is a hard saying, to be sure, and we point to no person; let every one be his own jury, like Joseph Fels. But thieves

they are, you know—thieves in all but guilty intent.

Some may have the guilty intent, too, but they are not worth distinguishing, for it can't be easily proved and it wouldn't be worth the proving. Let us, then, acknowledge guiltless intent in all.

This shields them from the penalties of the criminal law, and irritation at being regarded as sure enough thieves. But it cannot shield them from the penalties of violated natural law, which is no respecter of persons and takes no account of intent.

Natural law is inexorable, from the bursting of a toy balloon to the collapse of a civilization. You cannot have hundred million dollar babies and Pullman car pups, in the midst of suicides, murders, robberies, wretched wages, scant employment, starving babies and factory-foundered women, without sooner or later incurring its penalties. Think of the spectacle on Sinai as a fact of history or a truth symbolized, as you please; nevertheless you must see that you cannot escape that elemental law of those tablets of stone which reads: "*Thou shalt not steal.*"

✦

The history of slavery in all its crude forms goes to verify that great law (of which we make so little when we relate it only to the larcenies of the criminal code) and to prove its penalties inexorable. Sanitary scientists are overwhelmingly proving its truth now. While perfumed seigneurs delicately lounging in some Oeil-de-Boeuf—or busy capitalizers of common property, where lounging seigneurs are out of date—have an alchemy of the law whereby they may extract the juices of the industry of others for their very own, there will be slums as well as palaces, and the slums will avenge themselves by infecting palaces with disease and rearing kidnapers for palace-bred babies.

Nor always, it may be, in those ways alone. Read your Carlyle again and see.

Carlyle phrased a question and its answer for the disinherited of every era, a question addressed not alone to perfumed seigneurs of the old regime in France, but as well to the American classes of our day among whom hundred-million-dollar babies are born: "How have ye treated us, how have ye taught us, fed us and led us, while we toiled for you? The answer can be read in flames over the nightly summer sky. This is the feeding and leading we have had of you: Emptiness,—of pocket, of stomach, of head and of heart. Behold, there is *nothing in us*; nothing but what Nature gives her wild children of the desert: Ferocity and Appetite; Strength grounded on Hunger. Did ye mark among your *Rights* of Man, that man was

not to die of starvation while there was bread reaped by him? It is among the *Mights of Man!*"

Pray let no one be such a silly fate-defying fool as to take for violent threats what are but friendly warnings. Of disaster these warnings are, indeed—and of disaster inevitable, of the world-old kind, if the world-old crime of the classes against the masses be persisted in. You can avoid the catastrophe if you help establish justice. But if you keep on pampering your own insanely selfish desires for luxury, or your pride of power, until you have exploited out of the toiling millions everything but those primal faculties of the savage to which Carlyle gives name—Ferocity and Appetite, strength grounded in hunger—the disaster will overwhelm you, overwhelm us all, as inevitably as effect follows cause.

+

Are you blind to the menacing signs that even now appear? The necessity for an armored baby carriage, and doubtless it is a necessity, is one of them. Is there no fateful meaning to you in the growing violence attending labor strikes? nor in such more advanced signs as mutinies of long trained policemen when ordered on strike duty? Haven't you read of something like this in stories of the French Revolution? Are you, like the French seigneurs, so insane as to imagine that repressive laws can control their ferocity and appetite, their strength grounded in hunger, once you have stripped your toilers of all but these? You may imprison them, you may kill them. Aye, but not so can you kill that which perennially raises them up in savage revolt. This is your crime against them, and you can kill that only by giving it up and sinning against them no more.

Is it not more wise, more human, more honest, to do as Joseph Fels is doing—acknowledge that the overwealthy, whether they intend to be thieves or not, owe their wealth to economic institutions that defy the mandate "Thou shalt not steal," and set about abolishing those institutions by educational methods? Instead of making war upon the impoverished and growingly impatient toiling class, would it not be better, even for yourselves—you of the Pullman-car-pup class, and you of the hundred-million-dollar baby class—wouldn't it be better for you, infinitely better for your babies, and no worse for your pampered pups, to soften your aristocratic or plutocratic wrath and anticipate an otherwise inevitable disaster by helping to do away with its cause? The cause is institutional. You may be no more to blame for it than are those whose earnings are your plunder. But you are in

better position than they to rid our civilization of it.

You have only to be a little less selfish, a little more thoughtful, a little more patriotic, a little less pious and more religious, a little more courageous with the courage called moral.

"Thou shalt not steal"—neither against law nor by authority of law.

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

TAMING THE LEGISLATURE.

Portland, Ore., Aug. 13.

"Business government," as the term is used by the People's Power League of Oregon (p. 753), does not mean government of the people by Big Business, but government conducted on business principles so as to give the people a dollar's worth of government for every one hundred cents spent for government.

That seems like a dream until you think of it.

But, after all, government is organized, as far as the people are concerned, to get bread-and-butter results; and if government is on the red-ink side of the ledger the results are not encouraging.

+

In Oregon as well as in every other State it is necessary, in order to get bread-and-butter results from government, to tame the legislature, to make some changes in the judicial system, to change the whole system of county and city government, and change the executive system. So this year the People's Power League proposes to amend the legislative article of the Constitution so as to tame the legislature, and to amend the judiciary article.

The more important legislative changes proposed are:

1. A six-year term for all members of the legislature abolishing the hold-over system for Senators.
2. Election of Senators and Representatives by a system of proportional representation, so as to have a square deal and less misrepresentation.
3. Power vested in the voters to recall any member, or the whole Senate, or the whole House of Representatives, or the whole legislature.
4. The presiding officers of the two chambers of the legislature shall not be members of the legislature, shall appoint no committees and shall have no voice or vote.
5. Making the life of a bill six years, if necessary, so that it may be acted upon at any time without dying a natural death because of adjournment.
6. Giving the majority of the members of each chamber the power to call a special session of the legislature.
7. Limiting the power of the legislature to use the "emergency clause" in passing a bill so as to prevent the filing of a referendum petition.
8. Amending the legislator's oath so as to prevent or minimize log rolling.

+

The corporation papers say the amendment is "hasty and ill-considered legislation."