

[see "The Gospel of Wealth" for "The Advantages of Poverty."]

THE ADVANTAGES OF POVERTY.  
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(editor: Croasdale)

In the March issue of the Nineteenth Century, Mr. Andrew Carnegie has an article on "The Advantages of Poverty," which was called forth by a paper of Mr. Gladstone in the same periodical, criticising Mr. Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth," under which title two articles of his were recently reprinted in the Pall Mall Gazette. The fundamental idea of the Gospel of Wealth as Mr. Carnegie states it is:

That surplus wealth should be considered a sacred trust to be administered by those into whose hands it falls, during their lives, for the good of the community. It predicts that the day is at hand when he who dies possessed of enormous sums which were his and free to administer during his life, will die disgraced, and holds that the aim of the millionaire should be to die poor.

Mr. Carnegie is of course a believer in the accumulation and growth of wealth, for "we know" he says, "that rapid as is its growth, its distribution among the people in streams more and more numerous is still more rapid." The few enormous fortunes amassed in America in the present generation, he says, were made under conditions that no longer exist; and as for such statements as that of Henry George, that growing progress is accompanied by growing poverty, he says:

I do not know a writer of authority upon social and economic questions who has not only disputed Mr. George's statement, but who has not pronounced their opposites to be the truth. In speaking to Mr. Herbert Spencer, of Mr. George's book, Mr. Spencer told me he had read a few pages and then thrown it down as "trash."

Trash it must be, for as Mr. Carnegie says: "My progress has inevitably carried with it not the growing poverty but inevitably the growing riches of my countrymen, as the progress of every employer must necessarily carry with it the enrichment of the country and the laborer;" and he proves very satisfactorily to himself, by savings banks statistics, the decline in the size of farms, statistics of pauperism etc., that the people of America at any rate are progressing without any increase of poverty. In fact, he says, "The condition of the masses is satisfactory just in proportion as a country is blessed with millionaires."

But, he nevertheless holds that the "hereditary transmission of position and wealth," which Mr. Gladstone defends, is an evil, and that "the hereditary transmission of

poverty and health" is the greatest spur to development of individual and national greatness, for "the greatest and best of our race have necessarily been nurtured in the bracing school of poverty," rank and wealth being almost fatal to greatness and goodness. It was to express these views he says, that he once wrote in a lady's album, "I should as soon leave to my son a curse as 'the almighty dollar.' "

To rear a son in ease and luxury and then turn over to his care the management of a great business or industry is, in Mr. Carnegie's opinion a crime; it leads to great failures and the ruin of thousands of people. Such businesses should pass into the hands of men who have worked their way up, and the beauty of it is, Mr. Carnegie says they do and always will.

This is undoubtedly line as regards ordinary competitive businesses. Look at the names of the leading merchants or manufacturers of fifty or one hundred years ago, and how few of them were in the hands of the ancestors of our present merchant princes. The collapse of a well established and mammoth business like A. T. Stewart's, after his death, shows the working of a general rule — that great fortunes invested in competitive businesses do not tend to perpetuate themselves. But our rich men have found out that there are other things than competitive businesses — there are monopolies; and great fortunes invested in monopolies not only do not tend to disappear, but tend to increase, for all that is required of the inheritor to increase his fortune is to simply not spend more than his income — for the rest the monopoly takes care of itself. Such a monopoly is the ownership of land: and the growth of great landed estates in the cities of the eastern part of this country, which have already passed from father to son for three or more generations, in a proof of the difference between a monopoly and a competitive business. But it is true that very few of the inheritors of such estates and monopolies take any prominence as men. Their training and education that would disqualify them from managing an inherited business, also prevent them from occupying their leisure to any great advantage; it is the men who have had to work their way up that do the great things. "Ergo," says Mr. Carnegie, "poverty is a blessing."

When we come to read between the lines, however, we see that what Mr. Carnegie really means is not that poverty is a blessing, for he rejoices in the fact that poverty is decreasing; he rejoices in the fact that in this country, as he believes, fewer and fewer of the people are doomed to a wretched struggle for a bare existence in conditions and surroundings that crush all aspirations after anything higher in life than a bare animal existence. In fact, his Gospel of Wealth is a plea to the rich to help eradicate this

poverty. He knows, as every man knows, that for one who has struggled and buffeted with the waves of the sea of poverty and come out strengthened and invigorated on the shore of success, a thousand have sunk beneath the waves "unwept, unhonored and unknown." What he really means to say is that it is a benefit for a man to feel that not on his inherited wealth, but on what he does and acquires by his own exertions will depend the respect of his fellow men; that every man should feel the necessity for work in order to maintain his position. This is true. And to bring about such a state of things, what is necessary? That all should be poor? No; but that none should be poor. In society as it now is, where the position, surroundings, associations and influence of ninety-nine out of every hundred men depend on their income, and where wealth can purchase from the poverty about it adulation, flattery, subservience and duties of almost any description, no matter how degrading or difficult, a man who inherits wealth naturally feels that he needs do little else than amuse himself. But in a society where no man who worked was poor, where wealth had lost its power to elevate or degrade, each man's position would depend upon his character and his exertions, and neither the spur of poverty nor the gospel of wealth would be needed to make every man struggle to do all he could for those about him, for only in so doing could he raise his own position.