

WASTE AND ANTI-WASTE

FOR the satisfaction of the needs of the body, and the nourishment of the physical life, four things are required: food, clothing, fuel, and shelter. By labour, and by labour alone, can these necessary things be obtained, and that labour must be applied to the earth, created by God and placed in subjection to the dominion of man. While ever the populations of the earth are in need of food, clothing, fuel and shelter, labour engaged on the production and distribution of these primary goods is fulfilling an economic purpose and is not wasteful.

Economic waste is either of a positive character, taking place when labour is organized for the destruction of human life and the necessities of human life; or it is a negative thing, seen when labour is engaged at tasks that do not minister to the health of man or is left totally unemployed.

Of positive waste the most obvious examples are war and the whole business of armaments and the manufacture of chemical agencies for the taking of life in war. (Yet even in the case of war it may be that the very real waste of labour is sometimes the only apparent means of stopping a greater and more disastrous waste. As the advance of a raging fire must be checked, and can only be checked by clearing an area—in itself a wasteful proceeding—to the end that the fire shall die down for lack of further fuel; as the progress of an epidemic may require the pulling down of dwelling-houses lest the ravages of plague and pestilence extend unhindered; as on occasion the diseased member must be cut off if the whole body is to be saved; so from time to time it has seemed that the waste of war was a lesser evil than the triumphant and

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undisputed march of an alien or tyrannical foe, and a smaller waste than the unrestricted devastation of an invading horde. Nay, in the suppression of piracy and in the opposing of barbarians the resort to arms, it can well be maintained, was an economic service to mankind, a distinct and clear check to the wasting of the earth and its resources.)

Of the negative forms of economic waste the employment of people, capable of productive work for the supply of food, clothing, fuel and shelter, at all manner of vain, unworthy, foolish, and degrading toil, is to be seen on every side. The toil is as fruitless as digging holes not for the planting of trees, but in order that they may be promptly refilled, and as wasteful as making a road that leads nowhere. That a million capable persons should be totally unemployed is not a greater economic waste than the employment of the same million persons at 'faking' antiques—furniture or pictures (a highly remunerative branch of the forger's trade); at compiling lists of prospective winners on the turf; at organizing sweepstakes, lotteries, and other forms of gambling; at inventing new hair-dyes or mixing new cock-tails—but the number of entirely 'wasteful' occupations in our own times, occupations that in no way increase the efficiency of labour, or add to the good things of life, is far too long to be told. Each one of us can make our own table. Such occupations are but akin to the digging and refilling of holes and the making of roads that lead nowhere. The point is that all who are not engaged directly or indirectly in the productive work of supplying food, shelter, clothing and fuel to man have to be kept in these necessities by those who are so engaged: and the larger the number of unemployed or non-productive labourers, the greater is the burden laid upon the producers. The answer to the question, 'What return do I make for the food, shelter, cloth-

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ing and fuel I receive by the labours of others?' will decide very often whether our work ministers to the well-being of our neighbours or is merely 'economic waste.' (But here again, as in the case of war, the apparently 'wasteful' work is frequently of lasting economic value. The unsuccessful experiments finally, and often at the hands of others, achieve their end, when the successful discovery is made. The long 'idleness' of brooding thought is proved not to have been in vain. The road that seemed of no use to anybody turns out to be a tremendous advantage after all.)

The trouble is that when the meaning of economic waste is fairly plain—so plain that we can make up our minds as to the strategy of our 'anti-waste' campaign and decide with whom, as good citizens, we will join forces in helping to get the burden of 'waste' lifted from the shoulders of productive labour, another factor in our social life is to be taken into account. *Non in solo pane vivit homo.* 'Not in bread alone doth man live.' To the Bounderbies and Gradgrinds 'facts alone are wanted in life,' and the teaching of all else is waste and vanity. Sleary, the proprietor of 'Sleary's Horse-riding,' a man 'troubled with asthmas, whose breath came far too thick and heavy for the letter s,' knew better than that: 'People must be amuthed, Thquire, somehow; they can't be alwayth a working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a learning . . . People mutht be amuthed. They can't be alwayth a learning, nor yet they can't be alwayth a working, they an't made for it.'

If there is a falsehood of waste that would make a variety of frivolous and futile activities 'useful' on the ground that profits were won and wages paid as the result of these activities, there is also its counterpart, a falsehood of anti-waste, that would ban the work of painters and musicians, of actors and entertainers, of

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poets and singers, because, forsooth, the artist did not add to the world's store of marketable goods. Many of the false prophets of anti-waste go far beyond the denunciation of amusement in their unhappy propaganda. They would cramp and discourage, since they cannot totally suppress, all that ministers to the spiritual health and mental development of the people. To them the graces and courtesies of everyday life are of no account, and the existence of contemplatives sheer waste and foolishness. 'Facts and facts alone' are to be taught in our schools lest the children perceive the Kingdom of God in our midst and discern Jacob's ladder stretched from 'Heaven to Charing Cross.' To Judas Iscariot (patron and first of all the false prophets of anti-waste), the outpouring of love, the devotion that spends itself in splendid and reckless offering, is horribly wasteful. 'The money might have been given to the poor.' The objection is still heard, and may, possibly, be still traced, as St. John traced it in the case of Judas, to the defect in the mind that comes of over-concern for money. Judas is labelled bluntly a thief, and a man without concern for his poorer neighbours—'*Dixit autem hoc, non quia de egenis pertinebat ad eum, sed quia fur erat, et loculos habens, ea quae mittebantur portabat.*' We must needs deal more smoothly with the followers of Judas. They, at worst, are 'profiteers,' a far gentler term than 'thief,' and at best are our 'leading manufacturers.' Ennobled, knighted and richly decorated—the titles and honours handsomely paid for—the sin of avarice is in consequence rarely mentioned.

Discerning the truth and falsehood of economic waste, we are yet confronted by energies misdirected, by extravagances that turn virtue into vice. Man has spiritual needs that must be satisfied, and can only be satisfied in God's way. Hence priests and the preachers of the Gospel are plainly of real service to

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man. But what of the ministers and priests of spiritualisms, occultisms, and all that Mr. Weller profanely described as 'every species o' gammon?' Is it anythings but 'waste,' the propaganda of superstition, the preaching of ill-news concerning man and his destiny? The services of surgeon and physician must justly be requited by mankind. But what of the quack, the careless physician, the incompetent surgeon—the hirelings and mercenaries of the medical profession?

The schoolmaster, the high-school mistress, the teachers in our elementary schools, perform a service that in the case of the last-named in especial, we cannot rate too highly. Truly they are the guardians of God's little ones. But the indifferent and incapable of the teaching profession, the men and women who have 'taken up' teaching for a living without the slightest sense of vocation, who would 'run' a private preparatory school as they would 'run' any other business for gain—how can the irreparable hurt inflicted on the young by such as these, and the evil and waste committed be adequately measured?

Take again the toil of the book-maker (perchance a 'Catholic turf-accountant'); the labour of all engaged in compiling, printing, publishing and distributing the countless sheets of information concerning starting-prices, and the latest betting odds; the time and trouble spent on literature or dramatic art, that corrupts, and is meant to corrupt the imagination and befoul the heart and mind. It is no use pleading there is money and 'profit' in these things; there has always been money and 'profit' in the vilest and cruellest of trades—the African slave trade of old and the international supply of female prostitutes (commonly called the White Slave traffic) to-day. Book-maker, racing tipster, pornographic novelist, alike are of wasteful trades—they create nothing serviceable to man, rather

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do they weaken the mind, diminish good-will and turn the passions to base account.

The activity, then, that adds nothing to the gaiety of nations, and nothing to the good things of life, but fosters unmistakably the anti-social instinct and the acquisitive desire for the property of other people—the whole indulgence in betting and gambling, sweepstakes and lotteries, has its roots in the desire to acquire somebody else's property—is sheer economic waste.

And sheer economic waste are the activities that result in broken windows—though the glazier is thereby provided with work and wages—and the daily employment in offices of people at the filling-up of forms unwanted and unread when filled up. The test of waste and anti-waste is not the receipt of salary or the making of profit, it is the service rendered. Waste is encouraged, not diminished, by payments for services that are no real help to the health of nations; and the simplest and most flagrant waste is the personal gratification of over-feeding—involving the payment of a great number of services. (It is said that over-eating and the wrong choice of foods are the cause of as much sickness in England as insufficiency of food, and I can well believe it.) With people rewarded for their wasteful toil by large sums, and others who would perform valiant work starved and denied opportunity: with the waste of over-eating and the waste of powers weakened by lack of food: with the common spectacle of two persons (or more) retained in offices to do the work of one, and outside the office many an overburdened man or woman toiling to accomplish the work of two—with these things happening around us the Christian citizen may well decide to take action for the abolition of waste.

But is there any escape from the follies and vagaries of waste save by co-operative effort? Can any anti-

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waste propaganda avail unless it be directed to the cause of waste? And until we have defined waste and know quite clearly what we mean by the term, can we hope to strike at its causes?

In avarice and gluttony and pride are the seeds of economic waste. For avarice drives people to pursue gain through methods disreputable and hurtful to their neighbours; and gluttony means the waste of good things procured and prepared by the labour of others; and pride persuades its victim that pomp and power of station require attendant idleness and the waste of strength in retinues of servants.

Co-operation in social and industrial life will no more remove avarice, gluttony, and pride from the heart of man, than it will root out his other unruly wills and affections. But at least a co-operative order in society will not encourage avarice, gluttony and pride by high rewards, as the capitalism and anarchy of modern industrialism encourages these, our detestable sins. For a co-operative order will bring the communal spirit into industry; and gluttony and avarice are always intolerable where the communal spirit is alive—in school, college, regiment, for instance—and instead of achieving fame are, unchecked, apt to bring their possessors to distress.

The co-operative order in industry with a society informed with the communal spirit, and with labour no longer at the mercy of supply and demand, but organized to produce for the satisfaction of our hearts and not for the earning of dividends and profit, and economic waste and anti-waste soon cease to be questions of tragic and pressing importance. Without co-operation and the communal spirit we remain be-spoiled and wasted; the labourer wasting his strength at unholy occupations, and the idler wasting his leisure because in some cases no man hath hired him, and in

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other cases because he has the legal right to command services without rendering any return.

Judas Iscariot and his disciples, Bounderby and Gradgrind, remain the outstanding advocates of the falsehood of anti-waste. For the discerning of economic truth there is no help from that quarter for the children of men.

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