

## THE REWARD OF LABOUR

“INDUSTRIAL unrest” is apt to be regarded in many quarters as something new and strange, an alarming phenomenon of the present age due to the sudden irruption of mysterious and hitherto unheard-of qualities in man. Frequent allusions are made to the “present unrest.” All manner of solutions, plans, and proposals are offered in the hope that labour troubles will disappear in the same mysterious fashion that they came. There is, too, a persistent belief in certain minds that “industrial unrest” will “blow over” as though it were merely a passing fashion, akin to the rebellion of the day scholars at Ipswich when Mr. Nupkins was magistrate and Mr. Pickwick a visitor. After they had conspired to break the windows of an obnoxious apple-seller, had hooted the beadle, and pelted the constabulary—“an elderly gentleman in top-boots, who had been called out to repress the tumult,” the latter was able to announce the retirement of the rioters in the memorable words, “Popular feeling has in a measure subsided, in consekens o’ the boys having dispersed to cricket.”

Not so easily does industrial unrest subside. For it is no novel or unique experience of mankind, this discontent of labour. It is recurrent throughout the centuries, and its sources are found in the assurance of an intolerable injustice. “Without justice what is governance but robbery at large?”

So we have slave revolts in heathen Rome, a peasant rising in the Christian England of the fourteenth century following the jacquerie in France, a peasant war in Germany two hundred years later, and numerous intermittent social disturbances. With modern Trade Unionism comes the strike; and if the labouring people no longer in their wrath behead archbishops and ministers of the King as they did when England

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was a Catholic country, the nineteenth century with its repeated strikes bears witness to a persistent assertion of the notion that without justice governance is but robbery.

The present industrial unrest is no unique or isolated event, then, in the history of mankind. Its sources are, as ever, in the consciousness of injustice, in the conviction that labour is defrauded of its just reward. Quite local and temporary causes may also be noted: (1) Resentment of mastery—but this is not new for it is found in the Peasant Rising of the fourteenth century. (2) Determination to maintain in peace the higher standard of living willingly conceded during the years of war.

The root of universal unrest, nevertheless, is to be found in this notion of the defrauding of labour of its just reward.

What, then, is the just reward of labour?—for until this is clear it is impossible to say whether labour is defrauded, and therefore reasonably and rightly aggrieved, or whether the whole discontent is based on falsehood and rooted in ignorance.

Now all material wealth, this surely is plain, is produced by the application of labour to raw material. Not that the personal labour of any one workman—artizan, craftsman, or labourer,—alone produces wealth. The product is the fruit of joint labour, contributed often by the effort and energy of a countless number of persons. It is quite impossible for a man or woman to say with truth to-day of any piece of material wealth, "I, alone, by the help of God, did this thing." (Yet, curiously enough, painters, architects, and writers are very much given to such expressions. Ignoring the help of God, or perhaps shrinking from such acknowledgment lest critics should suggest the help to be diabolical rather than divine, they even forget, in the case of painters, the

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canvas and paint manufacturers ; the army of bricklayers, plasterers, artificers in wood and stone, to say nothing of steel and iron workers, in the case of architecture ; and the printers and paper-makers required for the book producer.) The agriculturist may take credit for the crops raised—to the forgetfulness of the seedsman and the manufacturer of agricultural implements. The tailor, cutter, and dressmaker may overlook the services of the clothmaker. The master-builder is less likely to be unaware of the various agencies of labour upon whom he is dependent.

By the joint and combined labour, then, of a tremendous multitude of persons is all material wealth produced. For each individual workman is in his turn maintained by the toil of his fellows, and the apparently simple matters of feeding, clothing and housing require a host of labourers. It is amazing, for instance, the number of persons involved in the provision of our daily breakfast in London. Milk calls in the services of the milker, of railway, or motor transport, of the manufacturers of cans, jugs, cups and saucers. Tea brings in the indentured coolie labourer, the chest-maker, the docker, the seaman, and the ship-builder—but to get the full list of trades in the case of tea is too big an affair altogether. So with bread, and marmalade : who can get to the end of the servants engaged in our behalf for these estimable commodities ? It is really appalling how many people have waited on us in the course of a plain breakfast of tea, milk, sugar, bread and marmalade. And in spite of the enormous number of servants in various parts of the world engaged in our behalf, there is still, odd as it sounds, complaint that the number is not large enough !

We cannot, by any means, say plainly of the labourers employed in the social and necessary work of providing food, shelter, and raiment who is indis-

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pensable or who the more meritorious. Neither can any one labourer declare that he is sufficient by his own exertions.

The total product of all material wealth remains the total product of joint labour, and cannot be exactly apportioned. The application of social and necessary labour to the raw material produces all our material wealth : we cannot get beyond that.

And since the labourer is, in justice, entitled to the fruit of his hands, and the producer entitled to the product of his labour, the material wealth of the world, being the fruit of joint, social labour, belongs, in justice, to the labourers who produce it, and to their joint ownership, since no man can decide the exact proportions earned by each individual labourer.

The reward of labour, the fruit of the labourer's hands, so far from being his possession, is distributed quite otherwise, and the ownership of the producer to the product is very widely disputed by the non-producer.

The fact is that because the social services rendered by non-producers, by our business men, merchants, clerks, accountants, and traders, are of real importance to-day, and of real help in arranging and organizing the work of production ; and because also we are in closer and more personal contact with the shopkeeper who sells us tea than we are with the coolie in Assam or Ceylon, we are apt to regard the merchant as a person of even greater importance to us than the producer. (A big strike makes it clearer. If the miner is not at work, neither from coalowner nor coal merchant can we get coal.)

But important and useful as the business of distributing and exchanging goods undoubtedly is there is no wealth created by it. Exchange cannot create wealth. The merchant and shopkeeper may take the finished goods of the tailor and shoemaker and give him

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in exchange food, or cloth, or leather, but no wealth is created by the transaction. The mere circulation of money, for instance, creates nothing. A revival of trade is merely an increase of exchange and adds nothing to the material wealth of the world—the revival of productive labour alone brings material wealth. Could exchange and trade produce wealth then it were an easy matter for all to acquire riches, we could grow wealthy by visiting the pawnbroker. Alas! by the simple method of exchanging a pair of boots or a suit of clothes for the money that will buy food no wealth has been added to the world. Mortgaging land does not increase its fertility—only labour can do that.

When we distinguish between the labour that produces wealth, and the useful services of the distributors of wealth we discern, at once, that while material wealth is the product, and therefore the just reward, of labour, it is not possible that the labourer should enjoy alone the whole of his reward. The very young and the aged of the labourer's family, to begin with, must have their share of food, clothing and house-room. If Catholic economists of the Middle Ages granted the product of labour to belong to the labourer as his just reward, since he had earned it by his toil, they never doubted that a large part of the reward must go to Church and State. The pomp and dignity of high estate were rightly to be maintained, and the labourer must needs give of his labour. Tenths and fifteenths of income were demanded and granted, as readily, and as grudgingly, as were fees to the parish priest.

So to-day we can immediately distinguish services that must be maintained out of the reward of labour. The priest, the doctor, the nurse, the judge, the school-teacher obviously render services that the majority of people need, and therefore may justly enjoy some portion of the fruits of labour. Soldiers and sailors,

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legislators and civil servants, postmen and policemen in varying degrees serve the community and are entitled to due provision from the community. The constructors and repairers of roads, the responsible agents for sanitation and for the lighting of cities, the conductors and drivers of transport, if not directly wealth producers, are by their services entitled to a recognized share of the wealth produced by labour. The shopkeeper and the merchant again undoubtedly perform services that give them a claim on the product of labour.

The list of useful, though non-productive, services could be lengthened.

The painter, the sculptor, the musician, the professional cricketer and footballer, the actor and actress, and all connected with cinema and stage ; the novelist, professional writer, and journalist ; these, too, since it is judged their callings add to the gaiety of nations, must needs be provided for from the fruits of labour.

It is amazing the crowd of persons, who engaged busily enough in their own particular jobs, require, since they are not actually at the work of producing material wealth, to be fed, clothed, and housed by labour.

To understand how many are the sharers in the reward of labour we have only to realize that all who do not assist actively at the production of food, raiment or shelter are provided with these necessities of life by the labour of others.

The labourer is quite fully aware of the services rendered by priests and doctors, judges and nurses, actors and journalists, musicians and teachers, soldiers and athletes, and on the whole has given them liberal allowances out of his reward. In fact, whenever it is clear that the service given by the non-producer is of real value the levy required to pay for the service is held to be a just tax on the reward of labour.

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The trouble arises when it is not clear what service is given in return for the levy. The dues of the money-lender, for instance, are held by labour to-day to be an injustice, as they were commonly so held in the Middle Ages. It is not at all plain what return is given for the wealth taken from labour in the form of dividends or interest, or what service is rendered in exchange for the income derived from labour in rents and mining royalties.

If these questions could be answered! If all who live on dividends, rent or interest could explain that while admittedly doing nothing to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, or house the homeless, they may yet justly claim a share of the reward of labour for other useful services, it would help to disperse the labourer's sense of being robbed.

Labour gives willingly, as it always has, even of its diminished reward. But it is the spectacle of many taking so much from the fruits of labour and giving no apparently useful service in return that makes labour inclined to be impatient and restive. And the impatience is not by any means diminished nor the restiveness calmed by the assumption that to the non-producer belongs the reward of labour, and to the producer only such goods as the non-producer may allow him.

As long as it is true that all material wealth is produced by the application of combined labour to raw material; and as long as it is held, in justice, that the labourer is entitled to the fruit of his labour, and the producer entitled to enjoy what he has produced, so long will "labour unrest" continue if the labourers are denied their title and compelled to see the fruit of their toil devoured by others.

"Without justice what is governance but robbery at large?"

JOSEPH CLAYTON.