

Evil Results Mean Evil Causes

Lizzie M. Holmes

1905

Two clergymen who were sincere and faithful workers in their special fields sat talking together in the study belonging to one of them. The elder had referred to the recent articles published in "Success" entitled "The Shameful Misuse of Wealth."

"It certainly is shameful to use wealth in giving extravagant banquets, buying fifty thousand dollar fur cloaks, one thousand dollar handkerchiefs, five thousand dollar dogs and supplying them with costly wardrobes, coaches and coachmen to give them their daily airing, etc. But if the money rightfully belongs to the spender, we have no right to criticise him, I suppose. But does it?"

"No doubt even these vast aggregations of wealth may be legally accumulated, but not always righteously. But when we read of whole legislative bodies being bought up, and of the schemes to which great monopolies resort to corner the necessities of life, one must doubt even that legal means are always used."

"I believe there should be laws that would prevent such vast accumulations of riches. Or a public spirit might be fostered against it. It is certainly a great wrong against the rest of mankind when a few men own and control the wealth that would keep millions in comfort."

"But, my dear brother, what kind of laws would you make if you could? Where would you draw the line? You would not want laws that would prevent a man owning a thousand dollars from investing it in any legitimate line of business that would secure him a fair income. Then how could you prevent the man with a million from doubling and trebling it by the same means? How could you discriminate?"

The elder gentleman bent his eyes to the floor in deep perplexity. He could see no way out of the difficulty, and yet it appeared to him that the vast aggregations of wealth whose owners are urged to the most ridiculous extravagancies in order to get rid of it, while so many human beings lived in the most abject want, were wicked and unjust. But how was this wrong to be met? It did not seem to him that a legitimate investment of one's little capital so that a fair living could be obtained was wrong. He could not see a poison while it appeared in infinitesimal doses; only when it was so heaped as to be dangerous did he recognise it as such.

"I am sure," he said, presently, "that God never meant that one man should own and control so much of earth's wealth—it gives him such absolute influence over the lives of his fellow-creatures. But I see nothing practical in the plans of the radicals. It is a great problem."

This man possessed genuine sympathies and his heart went out to all suffering humanity. But his mind was not analytical and he preferred following his philanthropic impulses without endeavoring to find a good reason for his actions. His friend, Rev. Ernest Beverly, was his opposite; his was a logical, searching

intellect, but in his nature he was rather cold, and he was not easily moved by his emotions. He said:

“After all, why not yield to the world’s consensus of opinion? Established customs which have been incorporated into laws are tolerably safe guides. And these warrant one in earning money by fair business methods, such as profit taking, interest and reasonable rents. Even if one by these means gains a million of money, the rest of us ought only to recognize his greater ability and bow gracefully to the results of his superiority.”

“It does not look right to me. The result of one man’s enormous accumulation of wealth is misery to thousands of his fellowmen, and I do not see that it is any more desirable to submit gracefully than it is to remain silent when a great, strong giant is pummeling a smaller man within an inch of his life merely because he can. True superiority would be used to benefit mankind, not to injure it. The greatest and best men of the world have not devoted their energies to making money at the expense of their fellowmen.”

“Well, you know that most of us would make money by any one of the legal methods that presented itself, and I consider there is nothing wrong in so doing. The only question is, the use to which we put our money. We should be wise, charitable, and generous in the Lord’s work.”

“No matter if ‘we would all get rich if we could,’ that does not say it is right. And charity is a poor substitute for justice, you know. But I must be going as I have some calls to make. I would like to discuss this subject further at some future time,” and so saying, Mr. Wheeler took his departure and the other settled himself comfortably in his easy chair and fell into a dreamy reverie.

Suddenly he found himself in a strange place. It seemed that he was standing on a beautiful green island with a warm ocean gleaming in the sun’s bright rays all around it. and perfumed breezes lifting his hair from his brow as they floated by him. He looked about him and soon saw that the island was inhabited and that the happy looking people were busy in the fields and gardens, and also under light awnings of leaves and boughs where they seemed to be manufacturing such simple articles as they needed for convenience and comfort.

He found that the people were unaware of his presence and that he could watch them undisturbed. He saw that they lived simply though every natural want was satisfied. Their products were kept in one place all together, and every one could have what he needed, and no one ever claimed more. After the short day’s work was done, they all gathered around a fountain where the grass was green and soft and ate their supper of fruit and nuts. Afterward, while some of them sang and danced, others gathered in groups and talked.

It became apparent that their lives were natural, kindly, plain but comfortable, and that having no care, or anxiety, no scrambling and struggling for a chance to live, they were never sick and there were no worn-out, exhausted creatures to be a burden upon the others.

There were no rulers or officials; some of the older and wiser men and women were revered more than the rest, and these exercised a gentle influence for good over their fellows. But there were no artificially elected or appointed officers.

Every one worked a portion of the day and though there was no sign of any compelling power except a mild public opinion, no one ever shirked his share of the common toil. All worked

together in social harmony, singing and working in unison, so that it was pleasanter to be among the workers than alone and idle outside.

Thus these simple, kindly people seemed to have lived for many years without trouble or dissension of any kind; and it seemed as if they might go on thus to the end of time. But one day a ship came in from across the peaceful ocean. A number of finely dressed officials came ashore and a flag of a powerful nation far away, was planted in the sands. One of the number seemed to be in command and he asked the people to bring him before their chief. They did not know whom he meant, but finally escorted their oldest man into his presence.

“What!” said the new arrival, “have you no rulers? No government? No officials? What barbarism! I’ll soon change all this.”

He proclaimed himself governor of the isle and bade the people call him “His Excellency, Sir Philip Reeves.” He then proceeded to appoint other officers and to organize a substantial government though necessarily a small one. There had never been a prison of any sort on the island; but now one was ordered erected at once. A governmental house was next put up, and very soon affairs were in progress as in the great civilized nations so

Of course the acquisition of such blessings cost something. From the products of each man’s labor a little was taken to pay for the new improvements; and furthermore, as all the land belonged to the government which the newcomers represented, every one who worked on it must give some of his products to the officials for the use of it. And in a short time the representatives of government introduced a number of labor saving machines, which would have been all very well if the workers who attended them could have profited by them; but they were obliged to give a considerable portion of all they produced for the privilege of using, them and so the advantages were all on one side.

It seemed to these simple people that the amounts deducted were not large enough to make it worth while to protest. There had always been plenty for all their wants on the island and they did not anticipate any trouble on that score; they thought it strange that the newcomers did not care to work at physical labor, but were told that their task of managing the affairs of the island was quite enough for them to do and that the added benefits of an established government and well defined financial and industrial systems would more than compensate for the small loss to the actual producers.

A money system had been instituted; the officials issued a medium of exchange, part coin and part paper, and the inhabitants of the island were forbidden to use any other. But as the amount in circulation was limited it soon grew to be customary to pay a bonus for the use of it.

So everything being in good working order affairs progressed quite smoothly for a time. But presently it was noticed that the people of the island were not as happy and contented as they had been. There was no longer a common storehouse where all the products were put away and to which all had access according to their simple needs. The people owned none of the land and had to work much longer and harder than of old for the privilege of producing from it. They also had to work extra to pay for a place to live, and what they produced by the use of the machines principally went to the owners of them, while every muscle and nerve was kept on a strain to keep up with the new power. Finally it came about that a large number of people could obtain no land to work on and no chance to attend the new machines or to produce in any manner. So they could not obtain the necessities of life and grew to be very bitter and desperate, trying to injure and take from those who had been more fortunate. Then they were punished and put in jail.

Wherever any of the new machines had been set up, the people crowded about, jostling and pushing one another for a chance to work. So the cry went out presently that there were too many people on the island, and there were teachers who proclaimed that the misery could not be helped as God had ordained it so. But on investigation, it was found that there were no more people on the island than in the prosperous days when all were moderately busy and none worked too hard and every one had sufficient. It was also proven that the island could be made to produce much more than it now did, if only the idle people could get at it. Something else was wrong and after a time the cry died away.

Of course, the people, not having a chance to work all the time and having to give up so much of their productions for the privilege of producing, could not buy up what was produced. So presently the warehouses were full to overflowing, the granaries bursting with harvests, while the hungry and ragged inhabitants wandered about unable to purchase them. Naturally thefts, quarrels and murders followed such a state of affairs, the jails were crowded and the regularly appointed mankiller, the sheriff, had plenty to do.

Meanwhile, the officials who owned the island and ruled the people accumulated such vast amounts of the wealth of the island that they did not know what to do with it. They monopolized all the money in a very short time and owned all the land, machinery, means of transportation, and the homes of the people. They possessed in these things the means of accumulating everything that the workers had a chance to produce, so it was impossible for them to get anything ahead. These rich ones were put to their wits' end to invent new methods of using up their wealth, and offered premiums for new suggestions for amusement. They also gave away small portions of their immense fortunes and expected to be duly thanked and honored for it. And they had buildings erected called "Homes" for the various peoples in distress, who had never known distress until these officials came, and had them named after them—the institutors.

But the bitterness and antagonism engendered by these strong social contrasts, grew until the officers themselves were somewhat frightened. The struggle between the common people of the island became more and more intense day after day, and more and more of them found it impossible to gain any kind of a standing or opportunity to make a living. A hatred of the newcomers sprung up in the breasts of these beings who had before been so peaceable and contented.

Some of the rich men advocated extreme measures and were for killing and driving into the sea the turbulent inhabitants; others urged certain concessions in order to pacify them. It seemed evident that some kind of an upheaval would soon take place. Our visitor became very eager in watching and wondering what would come next. He now saw that what he recognized as wrong when presented in huge proportions was exactly as wrong in the beginning when the results were so insignificant as to be hardly noticeable in the lives of mankind. As a snowball is but a small affair at first, but gathers strength and further power to accumulate as it rolls along, so a little robbery that is scarcely recognized at first becomes a gigantic evil with most powerful and far-reaching results, as it progresses.

Our friend was very anxious to know what these island people would finally do with their troubles, for it had occurred to him that the people of the world so familiar to him, were in nearly the same perplexities. Now, he thought, if he could find out what these people did he might tell his fellow beings and be of great assistance to them. But as he gazed the whole island with its sunny, peaceful sea around it disappeared and his eyes rested on — simply a sofa pillow lying on a wide expanse of blue carpet where the sunlight from the window fell softly upon it.

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Retrieved on 29th May 2023 from www.libertarian-labyrinth.org
Published in *The International Wood-Worker* 15 no. 6 (June 1905): 168–170.

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