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American Social Science Association.

THE

Production & Distribution of Wealth.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE DETROIT MEETING OF THE AMERICAN SOCIAL
SCIENCE ASSOCIATION, MAY 11, 1875.

BY

DAVID A. WELLS,

PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION.

PUBLISHED FOR THE
AMERICAN SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

BY A. WILLIAMS & CO.,

283 WASHINGTON ST., BOSTON.

ALSO FOR SALE BY

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS, NEW YORK. ROBERT CLARKE & CO., CINCINNATI.
PORTER & COATES, PHILADELPHIA.

1876.

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CIRCULAR.

IN sending one of the recent publications of the AMERICAN SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION to libraries, and to persons not yet members, we would again express a sense of the success and importance of its work. Our list of members comprises names in nearly all parts of the United States, and forms a bond of connection for all who are interested in political and social advancement. The other principal means of action throughout the country are either political in the party sense, or commercial; both being subject to bias from private interest. The need of an organization animated solely by a desire for the public welfare was never greater than now.

It is evident, that never before in the history of our country has so much attention been given to the investigation and comprehension of the principles which underlie human society, and the application of which tends to ameliorate the condition of mankind. To concentrate these investigations, and to bring into association kindred minds working upon kindred subjects, and in this way draw to a focus the lines of action and influence now separate, possibly divergent, is the purpose of our Association, rather than the advocacy of any theory or any formula of administration. This work the American Social Science Association entered upon ten years ago, and has prosecuted with some degree of success; but to extend its sphere, and make its results truly national, a larger co-operation is now most desirable.

To aid in this work, the assistance of all persons interested in any of the departments of Social Science is solicited, at least to the extent of annual membership. The inducement which we offer is, primarily and chiefly, that which has moved others in sustaining the Association hitherto, — namely, the satisfaction of promoting a work which has now become necessary, and the influence of which, in some form, affects the material interests of every member of the community. At the same time we offer the right to participate in the government of the Association, and its annual meetings; also the yearly publications of the Association, which, each member is entitled to receive, and which are annually increasing in value and variety of interest. All the services rendered to the Association are gratuitous, with the exception of the expenses of publication, and the small expenditure necessary to maintain a central office of record and correspondence.

The *Journal of Social Science*, the Eighth Number of which is just published by A. Williams & Co., Boston; G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York; Porter & Coates, Philadelphia; and Robert Clarke & Co., Cincinnati, — includes the paper herewith sent, and others, among which is MR. DAVID A. WELLS'S address at Detroit, on the *Production and Distribution of Wealth*, which is sold separately. Previous numbers of the *Journal* (the contents of which, with a list of papers separately published, will be found herewith) may be ordered of these publishers, or of

F. B. SANBORN, *Secretary of the Association.*

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INFLUENCE OF THE PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT.

BY DAVID A. WELLS.

BEING THE ANNUAL ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION.

READ AT DETROIT, MAY 11, 1875.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, — In welcoming you to this first meeting in the States of the North-west, of the AMERICAN ASSOCIATION for the PROMOTION OF SOCIAL SCIENCE, with the address which ancient custom and a recognition of the fitness of things seems to require should be made by the presiding officer on such occasions, I propose to ask your attention to a line of thought touching the agencies which perhaps more than any other, are contributing to the moulding and development of society; namely, the production or accumulation, and the distribution, of that which we call wealth, or capital: meaning thereby abundance of all those things which contribute to our well-being, comfort, and happiness.

And, in so doing, the first point I would ask you to consider is, that, out of all of his present accumulations of wealth, man has never created any thing. What Nature gives, he appropriates; and in this appropriation, or collection of natural spontaneous products consists the original method of earning a living, — the method still mainly depended on by all uncivilized and barbarous people. The first advance upon this method is to make provision for the future by carrying over supplies from seasons of abundance to seasons of scarcity, or in learning the necessity and benefits of accumulation. But, in all this, man does nothing more than the animals, who, following what we term the promptings of instinct, gather and lay up stores in the summer for consumption in the winter; and he lifts himself above the animals only when, and proportionally as, he learns that he can tempt Nature to give more abundantly, by bringing various kinds of matter and various forces together, or into such relations as will enable them to act upon each other under the most favorable circumstances. And it is in the attainment and application of this knowledge of how to tempt Nature to give, — or, as we term it, “*to produce*,” using to express our meaning most correctly a word which signifies “*to lead forth*,” and not “*to create*,” — that the distinction is to be found between

the civilized and uncivilized methods of earning a living; man in the one case being mainly a collector, and in the other a “*drawer-out*,” or producer. And herein, furthermore, is to be found the characteristic, or, as Chevalier the French economist expresses it, “the mystery and marvel, of our modern civilization; namely, that, through the attainment and exercise of increased knowledge and experience, we have so far come to know the properties of matter and the forces of Nature, as to enable us to compel the two to work in unison for our benefit with continually increasing effectiveness; and so afford to us from generation to generation a continually increasing product of abundance with a continually diminishing necessity for the exercise of physical labor.” And, as some evidence of the degree of success thus far attained to in this direction, we have the simple statement, — yet of all things the one most marvellous in our experience, — that at the present time, in Great Britain alone, the force annually evolved through the combustion of coal, and applied to the performance of mechanical work, is directly equivalent to the muscular power of at least one hundred millions of men; or, to state the case differently, the result attained to is the same as if the laboring population of Great Britain had been increased twelve-fold, without necessitating any material increase in production for the support and sustenance of this additional number.

Another illustration to the same effect, but one more recent and less familiar, is afforded by the construction and operation of the Suez Canal. Thus, a few years ago, a swift voyage from England to Calcutta, *viâ* the Cape of Good Hope, was from a hundred and ten to a hundred and twenty days. Now steamers by way of the canal make the same voyage in about thirty days. Here, then, is a diminution of seventy-five per cent on the enormous stocks of goods continually required to be held unused, involving continued risk of depreciation, loss of interest, and cost of insurance, to meet the requirements of mere transit. Add to which the fact, that the improvements in marine engines enable these vessels to work with about one-tenth less coal, and therefore carry proportionally more cargo, than they could seven or eight years ago; and that the construction of the telegraph between England and India enables dealers and consumers also to regulate their supplies without carrying excessive stocks of commodities, keeps prices steady, and discourages speculation, — and we have in this single department of trade and commerce a saving and release of capital and labor for other purposes and employments, that amounts to a revolution.

What is yet to be accomplished in the way of increasing the proportion of product to manual labor, time alone can show; but there is no evidence at present to indicate that we are approaching any limitation to further progress in this direction. A writer in “The London Econo-

mist" in 1873, evidently most conversant with his subject, claimed that the industry of the population of Great Britain at that time, taken man for man, was nearly twice as productive as it was in 1850; and I do not think that any one can review the industrial experience of the United States as a whole since 1860, but must feel satisfied that our average gain in the power of production during that time, and in spite of the war, has not been less than from fifteen to twenty per cent. And, if this statement should seem to any to be exaggerated, it is well to call to mind, that it is mainly within the last fifteen years that the very great improvements in machinery adapted to agriculture have been brought into general use; that whereas a few years ago, men on the great fields of the West cut grain with sickles and with cradles, toiling from early morn to dewy eve in the hottest period of the year, the same work may be done now almost as a matter of recreation; the director of a mechanical reaper entering the field behind a pair of horses, with gloves on his hands, and an umbrella over his head, and in this style finishing the work in a fraction of the time which many men would formerly have required, and in a manner much more satisfactory. I would also recall to you, that, in the manufacture of boots and shoes, three men now, with the aid of machinery, can produce as much in a given time as six men unaided could have done in 1860; that we have forty thousand more miles of railroad now than we then had to assist us in the work of exchange and distribution; that we can send our telegrams now for less than one-half what it actually cost to do the work in 1866; and finally, taking the Pennsylvania Central Railroad as a type, that we can send our freight by railroad at an average of 1.48 of a cent per ton per mile, as compared with a charge of 2.41 on the same road for the same service in 1864.

And, as a curious incident of this continuous progress, it may be here also noted, that the abandonment of large quantities of costly machinery in most branches of staple manufactures, and its replacement by new, is periodically rendered a matter of absolute economical necessity, in order to produce more perfectly and cheaply, and at the same time avoid the destruction of a much greater amount of capital by industrial rivalry; thus strikingly illustrating an economic principle to which attention was, I think, first called by my friend Mr. Atkinson of Boston, — that the absolute destruction of what has once been wealth often marks a greater step in the progress of civilization than any great increase in material accumulation; the breaking-up and destruction of the old machinery, and its replacement by new, in the cases referred to, being the sole conditions under which a diminution of the cost of production could be effected, and the abundance of product be made greater.

We are often accustomed to speak of, and perhaps look forward to, a period which we call "millennial," which is to be characterized in particular by an absence of want of all those things which minister to our material comfort and happiness. But when that period arrives, if it ever does, one of two things must take place: either man must so far change his nature as to be able to exist in comfort without a supply of all those objects which are comprised under the general terms, *food, clothing, shelter, and luxuries*; or else the forces of nature must be so much further subordinated and brought under our control, as to do *all* our work for us, instead of, as now, doing but a part; and thus become in all respects our all-sufficient ministers and servants.

But, when that time comes, then all material wealth, as we ordinarily use the term, must disappear; for that only is wealth which has exchangeable value, and that only has exchangeable value which is desired. But we can neither value nor desire that which, like the air, is at all times given to all, in excess of any possible use or necessity.

But, fanciful as may be this speculation, it is nevertheless a most interesting and suggestive circumstance, that all of our true material progress constantly points in this same direction: inasmuch as the great result of every new invention or discovery in economic processes is to eliminate or discharge value; making those things cheap which were before dear, and bringing within the reach and use of all what before were for the exclusive use and enjoyment of the few. Thus, in 1170, Thomas À Becket was accounted extravagant because he had his parlor strewed every day with clean rushes; and, four hundred years later, cloth was so scarce that Shakspeare makes Falstaff's shirts cost him four shillings per ell. But few are so poor nowadays as not to be able to afford some sort of a carpet for their parlor; and, making allowance for the purchasing power of money at the different epochs, Falstaff's four shillings would now give him near *forty* times the same quantity.

Again: Sir Henry Bracton, who was Lord Chief Justice of England in the time of Henry III., wrote in the way of legal illustration, that if a man living in Oxford engage to pay money the same day in London, a distance of fifty-four miles, he shall be discharged from his contract, by reason of his undertaking to do a physical impossibility. But to-day, what Bracton regarded as impossible, can be readily accomplished in from sixty to eighty minutes.

That this wonderful and continued increase in the gross product of every department of human industry and enterprise has been also attended with a general rise in the standard of comfort, leisure, and enjoyment, available everywhere to the masses, is sufficiently proved by not only the most superficial of observation, but also by a great variety

of statistics, which, although not as yet in any degree formulated or referred to an average, are nevertheless exceedingly interesting.

Thus, for example, the British commercial reports indicate that the ability of the populations of Russia and of Germany to consume cotton has at least doubled since 1851; that in Sweden the increase has been fourfold; and in Paragnay, fivefold. And not merely has the consumption of cotton cloth increased in near and remote regions, but the ratio of absorption among the working classes of Europe, of articles which a generation ago were luxuries to them, has also been most rapid and remarkable; the ratio of increase having been most marked in the average *per capita* consumption of meats, tea, sugar, coffee, cocoa, wines, and spirits.

But, gratifying as these evidences of increasing abundance certainly are, the cry of the poor, at least to the superficial observer, seems not less loud, and the difficulties of earning a living, or of getting ahead in the world, seem not less patent than they have always been; while the discontent with the inequalities of social condition are certainly more strikingly manifested than at any former period. To understand fully the origin of this social paradox, is to presuppose a full understanding of the whole domain of social science, or of the laws and phenomena involved in all societary relations; a degree and comprehensiveness of knowledge which it is safe to affirm has been attained to by no man. But there is, at the same time, a record of experience indicating the duties incumbent on society in respect to some of these matters, which cannot too often be pressed upon public attention.

In the first stage of society, property can hardly be said to exist at all, or it exists in common. In the second stage, individual rights appear; but property is to a great extent held and transferred by force, and the generally accepted principle governing its distribution is, *that might confers right*. As society has progressed, however, the reign of violence and lawlessness has gradually diminished, until now the acquisition and retention of property has come to depend on superiority of intellect, quickness of perception, skill in adaptation, — the cunning and the quick being arrayed against the ignorant and the slow, — while the principle which has come to be the generally accepted basis of all commercial, industrial, and financial transactions, is succinctly expressed by the coarse and selfish proverb, "*Every man for himself, and the Devil take the hindermost.*" And if we consider these terms as symbolical, and for the word "*Devil*" substitute absence of abundance, — want, misery, and privation; and for the word "*hindermost,*" the masses, who constitute the bulk of every densely populated community, — then it must be admitted, that the Devil thus far has been eminently successful. But the governing and controlling influences of society — meaning thereby

the rich, the well-to-do and most intelligent classes — have for a considerable time found out one thing of importance, and are beginning to find out another thing of even greater significance.

The *thing which they have found out* is, that it is not for the interest of any portion of society, regarded simply from the point of view of individual selfishness, and not in accordance with the religion of Christ and humanity, to allow the Devil to take anywhere, or to any extent, the hindermost; and *the thing which they are beginning to find out* is, that the hindermost, who constitute, in this struggle for the acquirement and retention of property, the masses, are becoming fast conscious of their power and influence, and are determined of themselves, that they will not, if they can help it, be captured by this devil of civilization; and, if obliged to succumb to him, may, like the communists of Paris, endeavor to draw down with them the whole fabric of society into one common vortex of destruction.

Out of the *first* of these discoveries have come schools, hospitals, churches, sanitary and social reforms, the spirit and the power of charity, and all brotherly kindness; out of the *second*, strikes, trades-unions, the crystallizing antagonism of labor against capital, the spirit and the teachings of socialism, the practice of communism.

It took society a good while to make the first discovery; but it has been forced upon it through bitter and costly experience. There was probably no less of kindness of heart five hundred years ago among individuals than now, no less of natural sympathy with the poor, no less of individual religious zeal to do as we would be done by. But society certainly did not act as now in respect to those things which society only can properly control and regulate; as, for example, sanitary reform, general education, protection of private rights, and the like. And for such neglect society paid the penalty; for, when the black-death and the plague came, they were no respecters of persons, and the rich in common with the poor went down to the slaughter. But when the well-to-do classes of society found out that these foes had their origin in want of drainage, and especially in lack of ventilation and cleanliness among the poor, and began to move in the matter, and provide remedies, then the black-death and the plague abated, and finally disappeared altogether.

During the reign of Henry VIII., seventy-two thousand thieves *are said* to have been hanged in England alone; which, if true, would indicate that "about one man in ten," during this reign, which extended over two generations, was, to use the words of the old historian, "devoured and eaten up by the gallows."¹ But society has now found

¹ Mr. Froude, while regarding this statement as wholly unwarranted, nevertheless admits, that the English criminal law of that period "was in its letter one of the most

out that hanging is one of the worst possible uses to which a man can be put to; and that it is a great deal cheaper to prevent than to punish, to incur effort and expenditure to save the inefficient and the criminal from becoming such, rather than to save society from them after they have once become so; and that, of one of these two courses, society has got to take its choice. Furthermore, as showing how social science investigations are taking propositions of this character out of the domain of philanthropic theory, and making them practical matter-of-fact demonstrations, I submit to you the following illustrations.

Thus it has been estimated in England, that the ordinary expense of bringing up a child from infancy to fourteen, in the best-managed public institutions or asylums, cannot be put down at less than 4*s.* 6*d.*, or somewhat over a dollar (gold), per week; and for the United States it is undoubtedly much greater. But taking the minimum sum as the basis of estimate, and allowing nothing for any outlay for education or amusement, the cost at fifteen will have amounted without interest to about eight hundred dollars; and at eighteen, allowing for all expenditures and for interest, each individual may be regarded as an investment by society of at least fifteen hundred dollars of capital economized for production.

Now, if from this period the individual fails to fully earn his own living, society loses not only the amount expended for his bringing-up, but other persons must be taxed on their labor and their capital to provide for his future support and maintenance; so that the general stock of abundance at the disposal of society is not increased, but diminished. If the individual turns pauper or mendicant, and does nothing whatever for his own support, the cost to society will be greater, though differently apportioned. If he turns thief or criminal, he will be supported even yet more expensively by society; for he will be maintained by plunder or in prison. But in whatever condition he may live, either idle or vicious, in prison or out of prison, the loss incurred by the community for each such individual for his life, which, after the attainment of fourteen years, is likely to continue until forty, cannot be less in the United States than five thousand dollars; a loss in Massachusetts alone, in which State at least one in fourteen of her entire population are paupers, criminals, or needlessly idle and dependent, would be equivalent to an unproductive expenditure of over five hundred millions of capital—the results of some other person's labor—for each and every generation.¹

severe in Europe;" and that, "in the absence of graduated punishment, there was but one step to the gallows from the lash and the branding-iron."

¹ For this illustration, I am indebted to the address of Mr. Edwin Chadwick, C. B., at the opening of the meeting of the British Association for the Promotion of Social Science, 1869-70.

10 THE PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH.

Another illustration to the same effect, drawn more directly from the domain of actual fact, and one of the most remarkable ever placed upon record, has been brought to the attention of the public during the past year, by members of this association, — Dr. Harris and Mr. R. L. Dugdale of New York, — namely, the history of a female pauper child, who some eighty years ago, abandoned as an outcast in one of the interior towns of New York, and allowed by society to remain an outcast, has repaid to society its neglect by becoming the mother of a long line of criminals, paupers, prostitutes, drunkards, and lunatics; entailing upon the county of her residence alone an expense of over one hundred thousand dollars, and upon society at large an estimated cost of over one million of dollars; included under which last head, is an item of twenty-five thousand dollars for the simple prosecutions and trials of one hundred and twenty criminals and offenders, who received as the result an aggregate of one hundred and forty years' imprisonment.¹

And thus it is, that reasoning from a purely economic point of view, and leaving all moral and religious conditions out of sight, we arrive at an absolute demonstration, that the very best thing society can do to promote its material interests, is to so far abandon its old principle of "*each man for himself*," that each man shall concern himself with the welfare of his neighbors and fellow-citizens to the extent at least of seeing that the Devil be nowhere permitted to take even the humblest and weakest of the hindermost. By many, perhaps by a majority of the community, the Association for the Promotion of Social Science is undoubtedly looked upon as an association of *doctrinaires*; clever men naturally, but at the same time men of seclusion and of study, unacquainted with the details of practical life, who like to meet together

¹ Of the descendants of this pauper child and her sisters, 709 have been accurately tabulated; while researches by Mr. Dugdale indicate that the total aggregate of their descendants reach the large number of 1,200 persons, living and dead.

"Of the 709, 91 are known to be illegitimate and 368 legitimate, leaving 250 unknown as to birth. 128 are known to be prostitutes; 18 kept houses of ill-fame; and 67 were diseased, and therefore cared for by the public. Only 22 ever acquired property, and eight of these lost what they had gained; 172 received outdoor relief during an aggregate number of 734 years; 64 were in the almshouse of the county, and spent there an aggregate number of 96 years; 76 were publicly recorded as criminals.

"The crimes of the females were licentiousness, and those of the males violence and theft. But the record quoted is merely their public history of criminality, which is necessarily very imperfect. Great numbers of offences of this wretched family were never entered on any court records; and hundreds were never brought to trial. Another appalling feature in this history of criminal inheritance is the disease spread through the county by these vagrant children, and the consequent lunacy, idiocy, epilepsy, and final weakness of body and mind, which belongs to inherited pauperism, transmitted to so many human beings." — *Report of Children's Aid Society, New York, 1875.*

periodically, hear themselves talk, and see their names appended to long articles in the magazines and newspapers. To any such I would commend, for instruction and conversion, a typical illustration of social science work, as embodied in a paper, by Dr. W. E. Boardman of Boston, recently published by the State Board of Health of Massachusetts. In this paper it is shown that the rate of mortality in Massachusetts — twenty in a thousand — is higher than in most of the States of the Union; that it compares *quite unfavorably* with many of the larger cities of Europe, that it tends to increase rather than diminish, and more especially that there is an increasing amount of death and sickness from causes which are known to be avoidable; also, that there is every reason to suppose, that by encouraging the study and following out the teachings of sanitary science, the death-rate of the State can be speedily reduced from twenty to fifteen per thousand; and, that in case this is done, the saving in the cost of sickness and disability to the working classes alone of the State will not be less than *three* millions of dollars per annum. Now, if the man who makes two blades of grass grow where but one grew before, is a public benefactor, how much more so is the individual who, by the patient gathering and study of statistics like these, convinces a community of a danger in respect to which it would otherwise be long ignorant; and then, as the result of such conviction, initiates a reform which not only greatly diminishes the aggregate of human suffering, but also greatly increases the aggregate of material abundance? Nay, further, can any soil be cultivated, can any work be done, likely to yield so large fruition, so many blades bearing ears with full corn in the ear, as this work of the so-called *doctrinaires*?

And there is yet one other thing which society is also beginning to find out; and that is, that all these questions relating to the production and distribution of wealth, and the avoidance on the part of society of waste, and the economizing of expenditure, affect an infinitely higher class of interests than those measurable by dollars and cents; and that the laws underlying and controlling economic progress are either identical with the laws underlying and controlling intellectual, moral, and religious progress, or at least are so far similar and closely connected as to be mutually interdependent. And we hold furthermore, that it is mainly from a lack of perception and appreciation of this truth, especially by those to whom the mission of making men better is particularly intrusted, that so much of the work undertaken in these latter days by philanthropic and religious associations has been like seed sown upon stony ground, productive of but little benefit.

“The study and investigation of these questions of taxation, currency, and the production and distribution of wealth,” said one of our best-

known philanthropists lately "are all very well, and undoubtedly most important; but somehow they do not interest me. They seem to me to be wholly material, while the great thing, in my opinion, to be worked for on behalf of society, is the attainment of a larger life."

Now, as to the ultimate issue and end of all our effort, I fully agree, a larger life is the one thing essential. It is the consummation of all social progress, the crowning glory of all Christian civilization; the aspiration of a future state of existence. But on this earth, and while we continue in the flesh, in order that there may be a larger life, there must be an exemption from such servitude of toil as precludes leisure; and, in order that there may be more leisure with less want, there must be greater abundance; and, in order that there *can* be greater abundance, there must be larger production, more economical using, and a more equitable distribution. So that instead of there being any real or fancied antagonism, or diversity of interest, between the work of investigating and determining the laws which govern the production and distribution of wealth, and the business of calling men to a larger and a higher life, the former, as society is at present constituted, must be the forerunner and coadjutor of the latter; or the labor of the latter, as has been too often the case, will be labor in vain.

When Van der Kempt, a Dutch missionary, first entered upon his work in South Africa, he devoted himself in the outset to the labor of reconstructing and improving the dwellings of the natives; and for this purpose followed for a time the business of the brickmaker, the mason, and the carpenter. When taken to task for doing these things, rather than devoting his whole time to the preaching of the gospel, he is said to have made answer substantially as follows: that while he had no doubt that the Spirit of God would enter a brush but with a mud floor, and dwell therein, he felt equally certain that it would come more readily into a house with a tiled roof, dry floor, and glazed windows; and, when there, would be more likely to abide permanently. And he was right; for the reason that it is not easy — nay, all but impossible — to lead a life of intellectuality, purity, and righteousness, amid filth, poverty, and all the adjuncts of physical debasement. And, if this proposition be correct, then it is a condition precedent to the future progress and well-being of society, *first*, that there shall be continually increasing abundance; and, *second*, that this abundance shall also, to the greatest extent consistent with the retention and exercise of individual freedom, be equally distributed among the masses. And the great question of the age, one which the course of events shows that we must before long, either voluntarily or involuntarily, meet and answer, is, How can these ends be best accomplished?

By the majority of those who have undertaken to discuss these questions in the interests of labor, the idea is put forth, that the ends desired can be most fully and rapidly attained through the enactment of law; but, in respect to the extent to which the law is to be made operative, the ideas which are entertained and expressed have no little of diversity.

In Europe, the masses emerging from the sluggishness and torpor in which for centuries, like brutes, they have been content to suffer and to wait, and grasping at once the idea — long familiar to the people of this country — that all men are created equal, have speedily passed to a conviction, that, because thus created equal, they have, in common with all, an equal right to all acquired property. And hence we find such leaders in the labor-movement as Proudhon and others in France and Germany, assuming and maintaining the position "*that property is theft.*" and demanding that through legislation the State shall take possession of all property, and provide for all its citizens an equal and adequate support.¹

¹ On the first publication of this address (newspaper report), very sharp criticism was made on the above allusion to the views of M. Proudhon and others of the communistic movement in Europe, by Mr. B. R. Tucker (translator of an American edition of the life and writings of Proudhon), and others, on the ground that the statement in question was incorrect, and did not fairly represent what Proudhon really did say and propose. As the subject is one of economic interest, the statement made by Mr. Tucker, in the labor-reform journal, "The World," is here given.

"The Hon. David A. Wells, in a recent speech at the Social Science Convention in Detroit (portions of which we print on the first page), made two misstatements in regard to the doctrines of Proudhon, which need to be corrected. It is, of course, undeniable that Proudhon's first notable utterance to the world, and the one to which he chiefly owes his influence and celebrity, was the naked and startling assertion that 'property is robbery;' and the truth of this proposition, strange as it may seem to an American Professor of Social Science, he successfully maintained to the day of his death, *but always with an interpretation of his own.* Whether this interpretation is a correct one or not, it is not our purpose here to consider; our only object at present being to show that Mr. Wells's assertion, though *literally* true, is in reality false. If by property is meant the possession and control of one's earnings, that institution has no stancher or more intelligent defender than P. J. Proudhon of France. We recommend Mr. Wells to study that portion of Scripture which teacheth that 'the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.' In Proudhon's Second Memoir on Property, written in vindication of his course in publishing his First Memoir, which caused such consternation among the French *savants*, occurs the following passage, which explains the meaning attached by him to the phrase in question: —

"I have, then, declared, my hand upon my heart, before God and men, that the causes of social inequality are three in number: 1, *gratuitous appropriation of the results of collective labor*; 2, *inequality in exchange*; 3, *the right of profit or increase.* And, since this threefold method of extortion is the very essence of the domain of property, I have denied the legitimacy of property, and proclaimed its identity with robbery. . . . I have traced all secondary questions back to the one fundamental question over which at present so keen and diversified a conflict is raging, — the question of the right of property. Then, comparing all existing theories with each other, and extracting from them that which is common to them all, I have endeavored to discover that element in the idea of property

Now, it would seem as if no argument could be needed in this country to expose the wickedness and folly of such a proposition; and yet such doctrines, in a thinly disguised form, are continually preached in this country by men claiming to be respectable and intelligent, to a much greater extent than the community are generally aware; and not only preached, but received with an apparently increasing favor and interest. Thus, for example, in a tract issued by one of the recognized leaders of the eight-hour movement in Massachusetts, I find the statement that the ultimate end and meaning of this special labor reform is to be, the compulsory limitation of labor by legislative enactment to six hours per day; *and that*, out of such a law and co-operation,

which is necessary, immutable, and absolute, and have asserted, after authentic verification, that this idea is reducible to that of *individual and transmissible possession, susceptible of exchange but not of alienation, founded on labor, and not on fictitious occupancy or idle caprice.*"

On the other hand, Mr. W. Jungst, one of the editors of the Cincinnati "Volksfreund," formerly a member of one of the German Governments, and who has made the study of Communism in Europe a specialty, writes as follows:—

"Mr. Wells was perfectly right in his Detroit speech, in saying that Proudhon's and other communists' intention was to abolish all private property, and to have it owned by the commune (the new government of the working-men). M. Proudhon answers the questioning title of the book which gave him his reputation (published in 1840), '*Qu'est-ce que la Propriété?*' (What is Property?), with the plain clear words, which nobody can misunderstand, '*La propriété c'est le vol*' (property is theft). Every one acquainted with the book of Proudhon referred to will admit the correctness of this quotation. M. Proudhon demands the abolition of all property, and, in the first instance, that of all landed property, of interest, and of rent. He says, 'To whom belongs the rent of land? To the producer of land, without doubt. Who made the land? God. Then, proprietor, begone!' And, furthermore, 'Property is theft; and it is not necessary to maintain it; it is not necessary to demand compensation for it; but what is necessary is to abolish it.' Similar assertions will be found in nearly all his books published prior to 1858; they form the leading idea in his first book mentioned above, — '*Qu'est-ce que la Propriété?*' and partly in his *Système des Contradictions économiques, ou Philosophie de la Misère*.

"No more proofs or quotations from M. Proudhon's books will be necessary, to vindicate Mr. Wells in the full sense of the word. It was not misrepresenting the ideas and intentions of M. Proudhon, — what Mr. Wells said, — but giving them in their true light.

"Again: M. Proudhon is not the inventor, only the imitator, of the doctrine that property was theft. The merit of it belongs to M. Brissot in his *Recherches philosophiques sur le Droit de Propriété et le Vol*, publiés 1780. M. Proudhon, however, re-asserts his own doctrine in plain words on p. 363, vol. i., of his book, *De la Justice dans la Révolution et l'Eglise*, 3 vols., published in 1858; and again in his posthumous work, *Théorie de la Propriété*, 1865. He admits expressly that he had made a mistake in setting up the doctrine of a third principle, to equalize the contradiction of property and communism. What he meant by this third principle, which he represents as a higher synthesis, M. Proudhon has never developed.

"M. Proudhon was a brilliant dialectician of the school of Hegel, with Kant's antinomy. His language was splendid, his imagination rich; but his thoughts were confused, and without any logic. His mind was permanently filled with isms in opposition to every thing. Proudhon is dead since 1865; he and his works are forgotten in Europe; and, the less the Americans know both, the better it will be for their welfare.

"Respectfully, W. JUNGST."

it will follow, that "the commonest or the most obscure laborer will live, if he chooses, in dwellings as beautiful and as convenient as any which are now monopolized by the wealthy."¹ To render his plan, however, in any degree practicable, the author singularly omitted to provide by statute, that all men should be born with an exact physical and mental capacity for production, and that, if any one by increased industry or frugality should perchance produce more than another, the surplus should be forcibly taken from him without compensation. Under such circumstances it cannot be doubted that all at no distant day would come to live in houses of equal similarity; but the style of architecture which would prevail would probably closely resemble that which now characterizes such truly free localities as the Desert of Sahara, the interior of Caffre-land, or the domains of the Esquimaux.

Other illustrations to the same effect may be found in the circumstance that a paper is now issued regularly in New England, which is devoted mainly to the object of combating the receipt of interest or hire for the loan or use of capital, or, what is the same thing (whether the editors be or be not conscious of it), of combating abundance or accumulation; that the same idea finds favor in numerous pamphlets recently issued in various parts of the country, some of which exhibit no small ability; and finally in the disposition so frequently evinced by our legislative bodies, to deal with corporate property in accordance with the principle of *might*, rather than in accordance with the principle of right.

It is therefore well for us, even here in this boasted land of freedom and intelligence, occasionally to go back to first principles, and see where these ideas about the distribution of wealth by direct or indirect compulsion, or about diminishing the incentives for personal accumulation, are likely to lead us.

It is evident, in the first place, that such notions are wholly antagonistic to the idea of personal freedom, unless we mean to restrict the meaning of freedom simply to the possession and control of one's own person irrespective of property, which would involve little more than the right to free locomotion; and, second, that they tend to impair the growth of, if not wholly to destroy, civilization itself. For if liberty is not afforded to all, rich and poor, high and low, to keep, and to use in whatever way they may see fit, that which they lawfully acquire, subject only to the necessary social restraint of working no positive ill to one's neighbor, — then the desire to acquire and accumulate property will be taken away; and capital, meaning thereby not merely money, which constitutes but a very small part of the capital of any community,

¹ The Meaning of the Eight-Hour Movement. Ira Steward, Boston, 1868.

but all those things which are the accumulated results of labor, foresight, and economy, — the machinery by which abundance is increased, toil lightened, and comfort gained, — will, instead of increasing, rapidly diminish.

And, in order to comprehend the full meaning of this statement, allow me to call your attention to an illustration of the extreme slowness with which that which we call capital accumulates, even under the most favorable circumstances.

By the census of 1870, the aggregate wealth of the United States, making all due allowances for duplication in valuation, was probably not in excess of *twenty-five thousand millions*. But vast as the sum is, and difficult as it certainly is for the mind to form any adequate conception of it in the aggregate, it is nevertheless most interesting to inquire what it is, that measured by human effort, it represents. And the answer is, that it represents, *first*, a value, supposing the whole sum to be apportioned equally, of about six hundred and twenty dollars to each individual, — not a large amount, if one was to depend on its interest at six per cent as a means of support; and, *second*, it represents the surplus result of all the labor, skill, and thought exerted, and all the capital earned and saved, or brought into the country, for the last two hundred and fifty years, or ever since the country became practically the abode of civilized men.

Now, with capital, or the instrumentalities for creating abundance, increasing thus slowly, it certainly stands to reason that we needs be exceedingly careful, lest, by doing any thing to impair its security, we impair also its rate of increase; and we accordingly find, as we should naturally expect from the comparatively high education of our people, that the idea of any direct interference with the rights of property meets with but little favor upon this side of the Atlantic. But at the same time we cannot deny that many of the most intelligent of the men and women interested in the various labor-reform movements in this country, taking as the basis of their reasoning the large nominal aggregate of the national wealth, and the large advance which has recently been made in the power of production, and considering them in the abstract, irrespective of time or distribution, have nevertheless adopted the idea, — vague and shadowy though it may be, — that the amount of the present annual product of labor and capital is sufficient for all; and that all it is necessary to do to insure comfort and abundance to the masses, is for the State somehow to intervene, — either by fixing the hours of labor, or the rates of compensation for service, or the use of capital, — and compel its more equitable distribution.

Now, that a more equitable distribution of the results of production

is desirable, and that such a distribution does not at present take place to the extent that it might without impairing the exercise of individual freedom, must be admitted; but, before undertaking to make laws on the subject, is it not of importance to first find out how much we have really got to divide?

Let us see.

Stated in money, the maximum value of the annual product of the United States is not in excess of \$7,000,000,000 (probably less); of which the value of the annual product of all our agriculture, — our cotton and our corn, our beef and our pork, our hay, our wheat, and all our other fruits, — is returned by the last census with undoubted approximate accuracy, at less than one-half that sum; or in round numbers at \$2,400,000,000.

But while this sum of estimated yearly income, like the figures which report the aggregate of our national wealth, is so vast as to be almost beyond the power of mental conception, there is yet one thing about it which is certain, and can be readily comprehended; and that is, that of this whole product, whether we measure it in money or in any other way, fully nine-tenths, and probably a larger proportion, must be immediately consumed, in order that we may simply live, and make good the loss and waste of capital previously accumulated; leaving not more than *one-tenth* to be applied in the form of accumulation for effecting a future increased production and development.

Or to state the case differently, and at the same time illustrate how small, even under the most favorable circumstances, can be the annual surplus of production over consumption, it is only necessary to compare the largest estimate of the value of our annual product, with our largest estimate of the aggregate national wealth, to see, that practically, after two hundred and fifty years of toiling and saving, we have only managed as a nation to get about three and a half years ahead, in the way of subsistence; and that now if, as a whole people, we should stop working and producing, and repairing waste and deterioration, and devote ourselves exclusively to amusement and idleness, living on the accumulation of our former labors or the labor of our fathers, four years would be more than sufficient to starve three-fourths of us out of existence, and reduce the other one-fourth to the condition of semi-barbarism; a result, on the whole, which it is well to think of in connection with the promulgation of certain new theories, that the best way of increasing abundance, and promoting comfort and happiness, is by decreasing the aggregate and opportunities of production.

In fact, there are few things more transitory and perishable than that which we call wealth; and, as specifically embodied in the ordinary forms we see about us, its duration is not, on the average, in excess of the life of a generation.

The railroad system of the country is estimated to have cost more than two thousand millions of dollars; but if left to itself, without renewals or repairs, its value as property in ten years would entirely vanish; and so also with our ships, our machinery, our tools and implements, and even our land when cultivated without renovation. For it is to be remembered, that those same forces of nature which we have mastered, and made subservient for the work of production, are also our greatest natural enemies, and if left to themselves will tear down and destroy much more rapidly than under guidance they will aggregate and build up. A single night was sufficient in Chicago to utterly destroy what was equivalent to one quarter of the whole surplus product which during the preceding year the nation had accumulated; and of all the material wealth of the great and rich nations of antiquity, — of Egyptian, Assyrian, Tyrian, and Roman civilization, — nothing whatever has come down to us, except, singularly enough, those things which, like their tombs and public monuments, never were possessed of a money valuation.

But the inferences which we are warranted in drawing from these facts and figures are by no means exhausted. Supposing the value of our annual product — seven thousand millions — to be equally divided among our present population of forty millions: then the average income of each individual would be \$175 per annum; out of which food, clothing, fuel, shelter, education, travelling expenses, and means of enjoyment, are to be provided, all taxes paid, all waste, loss, and depreciation made good, and any surplus available as new capital added to former accumulations.

Now, if at first thought this deduction of the average individual income of our people seems small, it should be remembered that it is based on an estimate of annual national product greater both in the aggregate, and in proportion to numbers, than is enjoyed by any other nation, our compeers in wealth and civilization; and, further, that this \$175 is not the sum which all actually receive as income, but the average sum which each would receive, were the whole annual product divided equally. But as a practical matter we know that the annual product is not divided equally; and, furthermore, that, as long as men are born with different natural capacities, it never will be so divided. Some will receive, and do receive, as their share of the annual product, the annual average we have stated, multiplied by hundreds or even thousands; which of course necessitates that very many others shall receive proportionally less. And how much less, is indicated by recent investigations which show, that for the whole country the average earnings of laborers and unskilled workmen is not in excess of four hundred dollars per annum, — the maximum amount being received in New Eng-

land, and the minimum in the Southern, or former slaveholding States ; which sum, assuming that the families of all these men consist of four (the census of 1875 says five), two adults and two children, would give one hundred dollars as the average amount which each individual of the class referred to produces, and also the amount to which each such individual must be restricted in consumption ; for it is clear, that no man can consume more than he or his capital produces, unless he can in some way obtain the product of some other man's labor without giving him an equivalent for it.

We are thus led to the conclusion, that notwithstanding the wonderful extent to which we have been enabled to use and control the forces of nature for the purpose of increasing the power of production, the time has not yet come, when society in the United States can command such a degree of absolute abundance as to justify and warrant any class or individual, rich or poor, and least of all those who depend upon the product of each day's labor to meet each day's needs, in doing any thing which can in any way tend to diminish abundance ; and furthermore, that the agency of law, even if invoked to the fullest extent in compelling distribution, must be exceedingly limited in its operations.

Let the working-man of the United States therefore, in every vocation, demand and strive, if he will, for the largest possible share of the joint products of labor and capital ; for it is the natural right of every one to seek to obtain the largest price for that which he has to sell. But if in so doing he restricts production, and so diminishes abundance, he does it at his peril ; for, by a law far above any legislative control or influence, whatever increases scarcity not only increases the necessity, but diminishes the rewards of labor.

Street processions, marching after flags and patriotic mottoes, even if held every day in the week, will never change the conditions which govern production and compensation. "Idleness produces nothing but weeds and rust ; and such products are not marketable anywhere, though society often pays for them most dearly."

But if law, acting in the manner proposed by the representatives of the working-men, is not likely to avail any thing, and if abundance is not as great as it might be, and distribution not as equitable as it ought to be, wherein is the remedy ? Shall we let things drift along as in times past, trusting that Providence will finally do for us what we are unwilling or unable to do for ourselves ?

My answer to this is, that the first step towards effecting a solution of the problem under consideration is to endeavor to clearly comprehend the conditions involved in it ; and that, when we have entered upon an investigation for that purpose, we shall soon see that the causes which

tend to diminish abundance, and restrict the rewards of labor, in the Old World, are not the same as exist in the New; and that therefore the agencies adopted for relief in the one case are not likely to prove remedial in the other.

In the Old World, the prime cause of the lack of abundance, and its resulting pauperism, is an over-crowded and increasing population.

All the natural resources, originally the free gift of Nature, have long ago been fully appropriated, and in part exhausted. Every foot of arable land has its owner or tenant; every mine, quarry, forest, or tree-bearing fruit, its possessor; and even the right to fish in the waters, or capture the wild beasts of the field or the fowls of the air, has become in a great degree an exclusive privilege.

When there is but *one to buy*, and *two to sell*, the *buyer* fixes the price. When there are *two to buy*, and only one to sell, the seller has the advantage.

Now, Europe, in respect to labor, has been for centuries the *seller*, rather than the *buyer*, of labor; and the buyer, therefore, has always been, and is now, all-powerful in fixing its price, and controlling it to his advantage. Again, in a country whose natural capital or resources — i.e., fertile and cheap land, abundant timber, food, minerals, &c. — is unexhausted or unappropriated, as in the United States, the rewards of labor, or wages, will be necessarily high; and on the other hand, where the reverse condition of things prevails, as in Europe, the rewards of labor, as expressed in wages, must be comparatively less. In other words, as has been pointed out by Prof. Cairnes, "So far as high wages and profits are indications of a low cost of production, since they are indications, — being, in fact, the direct results, — of high industrial productiveness." Nothing, therefore, more strikingly illustrates the difference in the conditions of the labor-problem in Europe and the United States, than the difference in the average rate of the wages of labor in the two countries; and also the fallacy of the popular notion, that legislative interference is necessary in the United States to protect domestic industry against the pauper-labor of Europe; or, in other words, to protect the people of the United States against the evils of abundance.

Under such a state of things, therefore, the efficient remedy, and indeed the only remedy, against pauperism in an over-crowded country, must be emigration; and it is one of the most curious of social phenomena, that, while the results of the most recent investigations show that thousands in the great cities of Europe are annually crowded out of existence by the mere fact of their numbers, there are

yet almost continental areas of the earth's surface, healthy, easy of access, and comparatively uninhabited, where the amount of labor necessary to secure all the essentials of a simple livelihood is but little in excess of the instinctive requirements of the system for physical exercise; as, for example, in the delicious islands of Polynesia, where a temperature obviating any requirement for artificial heat prevails uninterruptedly, and where the plantain, the cocoa-palm, and the bread-fruit spring up and flourish spontaneously; and also in the West Indies, where the late Charles Kingsley, in his book "A Christmas in the West Indies" (1871), says, that one of the first things which a visitor learns in landing at "Port of Spain," in the Island of Trinidad, is, that there are eight thousand persons, or about one-third of the population of the city, who have no visible means of support, or who live without regular employment, and yet are evidently strong, healthy, and well-fed. The same author also describes the life of an English emigrant in this island, whom he visited, as follows:—

"The sea gives him fish enough for his family. His cocoa-palms yield him a little revenue. He has poultry, kids, and goat's milk more than he needs. His patch of provision-ground gives him corn and roots, sweet potatoes, and fruits all the year round. He needs nothing, and fears nothing, owes nothing.

But, *per contra*, Mr. Kingsley adds:—

"News and politics are to him like the distant murmur of the surf at the back of the island,—a noise which is nought to him. His Bible, his almanac, and three or four old books on a shelf, are his whole library. He has all that man needs, more than man deserves, and is far too wise to wish to better himself;" which last expression is equivalent to saying, that, the animal wants being abundantly satisfied, he wishes to remain an animal. And this conclusion, furthermore, may be regarded as the result of necessity rather than of choice; for, if man resident in the tropics is desirous of any thing much beyond what Nature furnishes almost as a free gift, the realization of the desire can only be attained through labor under conditions of climate so exhausting that the white race shrinks from its execution, and for the most part is incapable of its endurance; as is seen, for example, in the raising of cotton, coffee, sugar, and other similar tropical productions. And it would indeed seem as if Nature, in view of the fact that great physical exertion and an elevated temperature are incompatible, had made provision for man's residence in the tropics by furnishing him, with the minimum of exertion, those vegetable products which are especially adapted to maintain and support a physical existence. And whether we admit the example of design, or not, it is certainly curious to note how man, when transferred from temperate zones

to tropics, instinctively adapts himself to these conditions, and exchanges a life of activity for one of indolence. Of this, the description of the European emigrant in the West Indies, which I have quoted from Mr. Kingsley, is one illustration. Another is to be found in the fact, often noted and commented on, of the rapidity with which young men of New England, sent out as clerks or factors to Singapore, Manilla, or Calcutta, exchange their original physical and intellectual activity for the listless indolence of the native population. And, descending to the animal kingdom, it is said that the northern honey-bee, transported to the West Indies, ceases after the first season to make provision for the winter, and, laying aside its habits of industry with the necessity for exertion, becomes not only a drone, but a veritable pest to the community.

In the United States, on the other hand, the case is entirely different. We have, in the first place, no excess of population in proportion to the area of country inhabited; but, on the contrary, we have, as a source of abundance and a certain barrier against want, that which no nation of Europe possesses; namely, an almost unlimited supply of cheap, fertile land. We have such a variety of soil, of climate, and of crop, that a deficiency of food, which in very many civilized countries is ever a source of anxiety, is with us a matter of impossibility; for the very conditions which tend to reduce the aggregate of the crops in one section tend to increase their fruition in some other. We have, as it were, the monopoly of the staple textile fibre of the world's clothing. We have more of coal, the symbol and the source of mechanical power, than exists in all other countries. We have every facility, natural and artificial, for the transportation and exchange of products. We have a form of government in which the will of the people constitutes the law. We have, in short, all the conditions which give to labor its greatest productiveness, and to capital its greatest reward. And if to-day these conditions are not fulfilled; if there is not to-day unison between labor and capital; if there is not a sufficient degree of material abundance, and a sufficient equity in its distribution, to lift up life among the masses, and make it somewhat more than a struggle for existence, — then we shall be forced to one of two conclusions: either the obstacles which militate and prevent these results are all artificial; or that it is in accordance with the designs of Providence, that there shall always be a needy and dependent class, that there is a natural antagonism between labor and capital, and that the capacity of the earth for production is not adequate to meet the natural increase of the population that Providence has placed upon it.

Now, I, for one, fully accept the first of these conclusions, and wholly reject the latter. And although there is much about us which would

seem to indicate that the characteristic evils which affect society in the *Old World* are being transferred to the *New*; though the present tendency seems to be towards a concentration of wealth in a few hands, to make the rich richer and the poor poorer, — I nevertheless feel certain that the causes which have led to these results, and which for the present stand in the way of a greater abundance and a larger life, are wholly within our control, and essentially different from the causes which in Europe are recognized as working disadvantageously to the interests of the masses. To specifically enumerate them, and to point out the degree in which each is operative, may not as yet, through lack of reliable data, be practicable; but, generalizing broadly, three causes may be mentioned as especially militating against the augmentation of abundance in the United States: —

First, Failure to secure the proper and possible maximum of production in industrial enterprises which have long since passed beyond the domain of experiment.

Second, Inexcusable and inordinate waste in using.

Third, Inequalities in distribution, due to obstructions created by legislation.

I have thus reviewed, as briefly as the subject will admit, some of the principal obstacles which at present, in this country, seem to me to stand in the way of a greater material abundance, a more equitable distribution, and a larger life. Did time and opportunity suffice, an almost infinite amount of curious and interesting illustrations, drawn from our recent national experiences, might be given; but, apart from any further detail, the general results of our economic progress since 1860 may be summed in brief as follows: We have increased the power of production with a given amount of personal effort throughout the country, probably at least *fifteen*, and possibly twenty per cent. We have increased the cost of living within the same period, to the masses, to the extent of from *thirty to fifty* per cent. But startling as is this statement, the truth of which any man can verify if he will, the attainment of a better result is entirely within the power of society in this country to effect, if it will only avail itself of remedies whose simplicity and effectiveness long experience has proved beyond all controversy.

But herein consists the difficulty. Like Naaman the Syrian, we are anxious to be cleansed; but, like Naaman, we expect to be called upon to do some great thing, and experience a measure of disappointment when told that the simplest measures are likely to prove the most effectual.

In point of natural resources, Providence has given us all that we desire. And that these resources may be made productive of abundance,

great and overflowing, to all sorts and conditions of men, there must be, *first*, industry and economy on the part of the individual; and *second*, on the part of society, a guaranty that every man shall have an opportunity to exert his industry, and exchange its products, with the utmost freedom and the greatest intelligence; and, when society has done this, we will have solved the problem involved in the relations of capital and labor, so far as the solution is within the control of human agency; for in giving to each man opportunity, conjoined with freedom and intelligence, we invest him, as it were, "with crown and mitre, and make him sovereign over himself."

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