

SOCIAL THEORIES AND SOCIAL FACTS

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Social Theories and Social Facts by William Morton Grinnell

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PREFACE

IF there is a great deal written on the subject of the economic and social conditions of the present time, the subject is of such vast importance and far-reaching consequences, not only to our continued prosperity but to our very existence as a true republic, that it may be forgiven if another student of the questions involved ventures to present his views upon the subject and offer a few suggestions which if not new may at least be pertinent.

One of the fundamental errors seems to lie in the assumption that the social and economic conditions now developing are new. As a matter of fact they are not new, but are proceeding in orderly evolution, substantially the same as have always existed, differing in degree indeed but not in kind. The fundamental inequality of man through heredity, birth, and environment has always led to inequality of condition, unequal distribution of wealth and of opportunity, but the progress achieved throughout the long roll of centuries,

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and of which the two great mile-stones were the introduction of Christianity and the Declaration of Independence, has been necessarily confined to organizing society with a view to giving men equal opportunity, and this is all that can be done. Of recent years, however, we have attempted to do more: we have endeavored to create equality of life and of condition; we have endeavored by municipal law to contravene natural law; we are striving to abase some and elevate others to one dead level of humanity.

This is the essence of socialism as it is of labor unions. Both systems are unfair and unjust to the more honest, more able, and more thrifty among us, and wrongfully favor the lazy, the thriftless, and the incompetent. Nature has ordered things differently, and Nature has ordered wisely. What we should do is to follow Nature and not contravene her, observe the principles of religion and ethics and not contravene them. Nature and religion ordain union and harmony and abhor fighting and destruction. We, however, enact laws against union and harmony and encourage waste and fighting—that is, competition. We enact fantastical laws opposed to the laws of nature

and economics, and we interfere with the laws of supply and demand. We establish arbitrary money standards, we establish the rate of wages and the price of commodities. We fairly revel in sumptuary laws, in spite of the fact that their uselessness and harmfulness have been proved in every decade of every century for a thousand years. In the meantime we forget the law of Moses and the elementary laws governing property which have existed in all times and among all peoples.

Let us, instead of endeavoring to re-create an impossible world and to establish an artificial condition of life, act in accord with nature. Let us not legislate against abstractions, but execute the laws against concrete offenders when they pervert the interests of union and trust and harmony to their own ends. Let us realize that the solution of the problems which confront us lies in the observance of the principles of religion and nature, and of laws which in their essence are as immutable as they are beneficial and wise.

W. M. G.

October 10, 1905.

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CHAPTER I

NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL LAWS

AN analysis of the trend of public opinion, and its influence upon legislation during the past quarter of a century, shows that we have been virtually exalting false and immoral principles and condemning those which are true and moral. We have exalted competition,—that is, fighting—and condemned union—that is, harmony. We have denounced and legislated against union of interests and of capital, and advocated disintegration and dissension. We have deprecated peace in industrial and economic matters, and advocated war and strife. No wonder that all such efforts to legislate against the true principles of ethics and morality and to impose a state of waste

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and warfare have proved unavailing. The marvel is that such a distortion of our ideas could exist, that our reasoning powers should have so gone astray. The explanation of course lies in the fact that immoral men have perverted moral principles to their own ends and that criminals are as numerous in the personal element of combinations of capital, of interests, or of labor, as outside.

In addition to the classes of enactments which directly contravene the laws of ethics and morality, there is another large class which, if not so harmful, is nevertheless injurious to social life, because it contravenes economic principles—such as in general are called sumptuary laws—those regulating the money standard, the prices of commodities, the hours of labor, the rate of wages, etc.

The long struggle to make, by legislation, silver an equal money standard with gold, with the consequent years of business paralysis, the suffering and distress entailed (as always upon those whom it was sought to benefit), and the inevitable failure, is the most recent and striking example of the danger of violating natural and economic laws.

But undeterred by this experience we speed-