

Labor and Brotherly Love

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Scripture: Luke 12:22-48.

Text: Luke 12:34, "For where your treasure is there will your heart be also."

Tomorrow will be celebrated as a legal holiday, dedicated to the interests of labor. From one end of the country to the other men will be engaged in various forms of intellectual and physical festivities common to holiday pleasures. We celebrate holidays in honor of some great event as at Christmas or in honor of some great man, as in devout recognition of God's care for us in annual Thanksgiving day. But "Labor Day" is peculiar in that it is dedicated to the common everyday duty of work.

All the various forms and aspects in which the so-called labor problems are forcing themselves upon us today are but expression of what we call modern thought. They are the manifestations in the world of wealth and economics of that same point of view which in the world of religious thought gives rise to liberal theology. If we accept liberal religious views we are bound to recognize the truths which are being revealed in the revolutionary struggles in the realm of business. Moreover there is a very definite and clearly defined point of contrast between these problems and what we all recognize as one of the fundamental ideas of religious life. It is the recognition of the dignity of human nature that makes possible the recognition of the dignity of labor. In labor and work, upon which men once looked with disdain and contempt, we are beginning to recognize the true basis which makes rational and sensible that truth which is commonly spoken of as brotherly love. True it is that behind all these ideas there is the fact of spiritual brotherliness, but it is no less true that the

¹ According to the notes on this sermon, in addition to delivering it at Marshfield Hills on September 3, 1903, Earl Davis also delivered it at Barnstable MA on September 4, 1904.

only means of expressing that truth is the recognition of a common purpose in labor. Respect for labor is the expression of man's respect for man, and is the basis of brotherly love.

Of late a great deal has been said and written in one way and another about Millet's famous picture, "The Man with a Hoe."¹ Perhaps Markham's poem, "The Man with a Hoe," written to give expression to certain thoughts suggested by Millet's picture has given the picture a somewhat exaggerated prominence. Now I do not wish to pass any criticism upon that rather famous poem of Markham's. I am well aware of the fact that it presents a truth. You know and I know that any form of labor has its hard and seemingly unrewarded aspect. The man with the hoe has some weary hours of it, but who does not? I know that there are times when it would take a vast amount of imagination to weave any romance or poetry into the art of hoeing. Anyone who stops to think of it, or take the trouble to make a practical experiment of it will discover that there is a great deal of truth in Markham's picture of labor in its dark, gloomy and almost degrading atmosphere. Let us grant him his point.

But at best he has touched but half of the problem, and I am not hesitating in imagining that he has not even touched the great truth of labor, but has simply struck upon an incidental evil connected with a great good. The hardship, the degrading influence of labor are but incidentals, which appear now and then, often enough it is true, but still only the incidentals. There is another side to labor, not less true, but much more inspiring.

If I were an artist, I would like to paint two pictures. The first one of these two pictures would be entitled, "The Man Without a Hoe." In that picture I would try to portray the man who has never known the joy and exhilaration of doing something, who has not experienced the subtle satisfaction of keeping the weeds down and nourishing the plant to fruitage. In such a picture, the picture of "The

¹ Jean-Francois Millet (1814-1875), French painter, painted "L'homme a la houe" in 1860-62. It inspired American poet Edwin Markham's (1852-1940) most famous 1898 poem, "The Man a Hoe."

Man Without a Hoe," instead of having a field free and clear of worthless weeds, as in Millet's picture, it would be to the point to have the man surrounded by a growth of weeds and tares of such straightness and unchecked growth as to almost completely envelope the man, if man he may be called. Then in the second place, the man must have a different pose. Instead of standing there bowed over by ages of toil, as Markham would have it, the man of weeds must of necessity be standing erect, and even stretching and straining in hopes of raising his head above the engulfing weeds to get a view of the surrounding landscape, and feel the warmth of the fine sunshine of God which he is fast losing because of his vain efforts to enjoy them without price. Not even heaven is given away, nor may June be had for the asking. The third change should be in the mental atmosphere of the man. Bewilderment, a longing for free activity, the hunger of body and soul, the wretchedness of a man who has lost control of himself must be the mental equipment of our man, a soul dying for lack of free expression. On such a picture, I fancy we would have a tolerably well-conceived idea of a man without a hoe.

It does not take very much insight into human nature to see that such a picture would be representative not only of the man without a hoe, but much more representative of any man without a job. A vast army of aimless shiftless pleasure seekers has never realized that the real curse of their lives is in the simple fact that they have nothing to do. I wish to make the point that the essential thing in our life is to have something to do, to have a job, to have [a] job that is our job, for it is only by having a job, and putting our efforts into that job that we are able to rise above the conditions, and work our way out into the world of moral freedom, and enjoy the richness and fullness of life. The man without a hoe is lost in the weeds which are growing up about him, and are shutting him off from life. The man with a hoe keeps his view clear, works out his freedom, and becomes master of something, even if it be only a hoe. Away with our condescending pity for the man who works, and our envy for the man of idleness. We have not begun to live until we have some particular work to do.

In our everyday talk we draw a distinction between different kinds of work. For one kind of work we say position; for the other kind, job; for one kind we speak of a salary for the other, wages; for one class of workmen we have no special name, but the other we designate as laborers. The dividing line according to which this distinction is made seems to be determined by the kind of tools we use. If we use a hoe, we are laborers, have a job, and receive wages. If we use books, either literary or account books, we are non-laborers, have a position, and draw a salary.

I said that I would like to paint two pictures if I were an artist, and it is just at this point that I wish to describe the second one. Its title would be, "The Man with a Book." Of course, he must be pictured in the midst of books. About him on all sides books are piled so high that he can scarcely see abroad. The only light comes from a dingy lamp, as he sits alone bent over a book. His shoulders are bent, his frame is emaciated, his eyes are dull. The expression of his face is one of haggard expectancy. Wearied by his years of labor, bowed down in body and soul, "The Man with a Book" is as great a slave as Markham ever dreamed of in his poem, "The Man with a Hoe." He has been seeking after real life where there is no life, and has lost himself in his search, a man of book wreck.

It is not the kind of tools we use in performing our labor that enables us to draw a distinction between higher and lower labor. To use a hoe does not make a man a slave, nor is the man who uses a book free. Not the man with a hoe, or the man with a book, but the man with a job, the man who has a real work to do, is the man who finds life rich and full and free. The man with a job may use a hoe or a book for his tools as he pleases. He becomes degraded only when he allows himself to become a man with a hoe or a man with a book. So long as he is a man with a job, using a hoe or a book as his tools, he is free and noble, a living growing human being.

If you and I who know but little of the laws of mechanics go to inspect a huge engine, we with our untutored minds center our interest upon the great fly wheel which seems to be the one great necessity of the machine. To us in our

ignorance, the importance of the one great wheel quite overshadows the importance of the less conspicuous parts. But let an expert mechanic come to inspect the same machine and quite another thing happens. He, with his knowledge of the machine and his insight into what is going on there, knows that one part is as important as another. He knows that even the automatic oilers, so insignificant as they seem to us, must do their work with accuracy and precision just as the great fly wheel. To him the question is not one of the greater importance of the fly wheel, but the more significant question, "Does each part do its work well?" The faulty fly wheel will be condemned by him with as impartial promptness as the faulty oiler.

In the long run the world is very much like the skilled mechanic. It commends and condemns, not according to the kind of work that one does, but according to the degree of excellence with which the work is performed. The man who does his work well is made use of and finds a respected place in doing the world's work. Often one hears a man say that, "That people are down on him, and will not give him employment." Now I grant you that this is a very hard situation for a man to be in, and I pity the man who is in it. But closely following this concession I urge that the reason for the man's condition in almost every case is the simple fact that he has never worked well at his whatever he has tried to do. I say I pity such a man, not because he cannot find employment but because he has never learned what work is. He has never risen above the animal-like conception of life, in which one strives only to get something out of the world. I pity him because he has never risen to that high plane of work in which, forgetting that he is working for money, or that work is necessary as a means of self-support, he loses himself in the joy of doing something and doing it well. The fact is that in general the world makes no distinction in rewarding and condemning its laborers. The man of great business interests holds his job, because he does something, and does it well; he loses his job when he fails. The professional man is rewarded and condemned on the same basis, and the man with a hoe takes his deserts with the rest. Do something and do it well is a law applicable to all, the first great positive commandment. If we use a hoe, let us use it well, if we use a book, let us use that well. Ruskin says, "The faults of a

work of art are the faults of its workman, and its virtues its virtues.²"

But the crowning inspiration to great labor is its purpose. If we do not stop to think of the purpose for which we are working it is inevitable that work will lose its greatest charm. Not for money, not for fame, not for self-culture, but for the development of human souls is the purpose of all work. Many people forget this, and selfishly struggle and grasp after all that comes within their reach, but their selfishness is made possible only because most people realize that their one great purpose is to help a human being grow. Rare indeed is the man or woman who will not work, and work hard that their children may have the advantages which will make their lives rich and full. Is it not becoming more and more the spirit of living that we should bear one another's burdens. Slowly but steadily our social and industrial systems are teaching us this great truth of the interdependence of people. With equal certainty we are responding to this teaching. Out of the chaos of greed, selfishness and avarice, there is slowly appearing the full meaning of that phrase so often misunderstood, the two words, "Brotherly Love." If there is one truth upon which men are coming to agree it is that human souls are working together with God for the accomplishment of a great divine process whose purpose is the development of souls. Every home, every social center is or ought to be responding to that truth. In the light of that truth, all labor all work is at once elevated to the plane of Divine Dignity, and man becomes a co-worker with God. Brotherly Love is the deep respect that we feel for one who is engaged in a work which is resulting in the growth of human souls. It is not mere sentimental talking when [we] say that there is a bond of Brotherly Love between us and that far Eastern country in its great struggle for freedom and independence and self-respect. Americans who are at all responsive to America can send a hearty God speed, given as from one brother to another. If we but remember the early days of our own English ancestors we can sympathize with a less enlightened people, and give them the hand of fellowship. If intoxicated by our own

² John Ruskin (1819-1900), English writer, philosopher and art critic. This quote is from his 1869 book, *The Queen of Air*.

success, we forget those less fortunate than ourselves, we have but to go back a few generations to find that the experience which makes sympathy possible is ours by inheritance. The same sacred tie which binds us to those who have fought, struggled and labored for us in the past, the fruits of whose work we are enjoying today, still binds us to those who are struggling and laboring today. Try as hard as we may, we cannot escape the fact that we [are] bound one to another by this tie of brotherly love, the significance and meaning of which is being revealed to us by the slow process of experience. It is this truth that calls us to all labor and all work. Men working with men, and man working with God. Not the man with a hoe nor the man with a book is the one who is a degraded slave and time server, but he who forgets the greatest of all religious truths that we are men working for a common purpose with God. Can we but realize that truth and all labor becomes a means towards a common end, and is done with a joy and a feeling of self-respect that brings the Kingdom of God into our heart, and takes our heart into the Kingdom of God. "For where the [sic] [your] treasure is, there will the heart be also."