

Helping the Other Man  
The Moral and Religious Problem of the Present

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You must have felt that in what I said last Sunday upon the subject of the bearing of burdens I was painfully inadequate in presenting the nature and the scope of the problems that man faces as he tries to regulate his life by fundamental principles of moral conduct. I also realized the inadequacy of what I said, yet the principle that every man shall bear his own burden is a fundamental principle not only of life but also of the universe. It is ingrained into our very being and nature. It is not so much the duty as it is the function of life, not a moral obligation placed upon us but a moral principle inherent within us. He, who would have a life and have it more abundantly, must realize the essential truth of this principle.

I take it, also that we are pretty much agreed on the point that the essential purpose of human life is the living and the realization of a deep full and abundant life, not alone for you and me, but quite as much for every human being that draws the breath of life. The saying attributed to Jesus by the writer of the gospel of John is true not only of Jesus and the purpose of his life, but is quite as true of the purpose of every human life. "To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth."<sup>2</sup> To live the more abundant life is to see the noblest possibilities of the human soul, and in thought, in speech, and in deed, to bear witness to them. The end and aim of my life, so far as it concerns myself, is to bear witness unto this truth, to bear my own burdens, to do my own work, to work out my own salvation with fear and trembling. The end and aim of my life, in so far as it is related to others, is to see to it that others shall have equal and even better opportunity with myself to bear witness to the truth in life. This must be the essential purpose

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<sup>1</sup> This is from the bound collection that includes sermons from May 24, 1908 to August 9, 1908.

<sup>2</sup> John 18:37.

of every man and woman. No one shall be a stumbling block unto his brother neighbor.

In the face of these principles of life to which you hold as the expression of your deepest faith, I wish to call your attention to certain facts which exist in our life today, that demand of us not only that we shall do our own work, but that we must do the neglected work of others. Let me state in a rough kind of way some figures to present something of the scope of this problem as it appears in this nation. There are probably, in fairly prosperous years, no less than 10,000,000 persons in this country who are underfed, under-clothed, and poorly housed. Of these, about four million persons are public paupers. Over 2,000,000 workingmen are unemployed from four to six months of the year. About 500,000 male immigrants arrive yearly and seek work in the very districts where unemployment is greatest. Nearly half of the families are propertyless. Over 1,700,000 little children are forced to become wage earners when they should still be in school. About 5,000,000 women find it necessary to work and about 2,000,000 are employed in factories, mills, etc. Probably no less than 1,000,000 workers are injured or killed each year while doing their work, and about 10,000,000 of the people now living will, if the present ratio is kept up, die of the preventable disease, tuberculosis.

These figures are in the main to be regarded as accurate. They represent the fruits of the corrupt trees of our civilization, and the extent to which we have failed of living the abundant life, and replaced the true standards of measuring life by false and vicious ones.

In order to understand the meaning of these figures, let us consider what those who have made the widest and most thorough study of these conditions regard as the causes, as the corrupt trees that are producing these fruits. Then we may determine whether or not there is anything that we may do. Take, for example, the question of poverty. 10,000,000 of our population are for one reason or another underfed, under-clothed, and poorly housed. The contributing causes of this result are at least four, and are indicated by the following classifications. (1) Those who are born defective in mind and body. The parents may or may not have been morally responsible for the conditions that produced these defectives. (2) Those who, through immorality and general shiftlessness, have lost their self-

respect and have become dependents or semi-dependents. But of these let him that is without sin cast the first stone. One hesitates to pass a judgement of condemnation upon such as these. It may be that they [could] have done better than you or I would have done under the same circumstances. (3) Those who have been honest self-respecting, hard-working men and women with a clean purpose and high ideals, but who, on account of sickness, accident, business depression, or industrial change, have been pushed to the wall by their fellow men, and forced below the line of self-respect. A very large proportion of those in poverty come to their condition in this way. (4) Those who, in the keen competition for employment, resulting from the excessive supply of immigrant labor, are forced to accept a wage that is less than a living wage. Under the compulsion of conditions forced upon them, thousands lose their courage, and finally sacrifice their self-respect upon the alter erected to the god of irresponsible greed.

To state the facts plainly and bluntly, we, the children of those who fought and sacrificed for freedom, who have taken our spiritual and moral nourishment as well as our physical food from the breasts of those who bore witness to the abundant life of the human soul and honored human life as the temple of the living God, we, I say, born of such parents, either by our actual participation, or by the approval of our silence, have accepted the immoral principle as a standard of life that it is more important that we become a nation rich in material wealth, and profligate luxury, acquired at the wanton sacrifice of human beings, than a nation that fosters the growth of man, noble in thought, clean in purpose, and decent in conduct. Instead of being a nation that fosters high-grade workmen, well-fed, intelligent, decently clothed, and comfortably housed, we have become a nation that is producing an alarmingly large percentage of vicious, immoral, weak-bodied, ignorant, dependents and semi-dependents. These people gather about the large centers of population, live under the most loathsome conditions, and live a most loathsome life, produce children that must, by the very necessity of the surroundings under which they grow to manhood and womanhood, become ten-fold more the children of viciousness and degradation than their parents. Out of these conditions come immorality, crime, deadly diseases like tuberculosis, viciousness and corruption.

Let me suggest one line of thought which indicates in very clear [ways] our change of standards. For many decades now we have been supporting a very and complete system of protective tariff. One of the fundamental arguments advanced in its favor, and indeed the argument that won for it its popular support, was that it would protect the American workmen from the lowering standard of living among the workmen of European countries. We must maintain a protective tariff in order that we may foster high-grade workmen. That was a good principle so long as it was adhered to in good faith. Of course, people know that it would mean high prices for imported goods and high prices for domestic goods, but they were willing to pay those high prices in order that the American workman might live upon a higher plane and become a larger, better and broader man, and rear better families. Very well so far. We have had the tariff and still have it, and we pay the price for our goods that our tariff system demands. But what about the protection to the workingmen? I have heard a hall full of workingmen break out into prolonged cheers at the mention of the protection afforded them by our tariff system. But they did not stop to think that while we have been holding prices of the necessities of life at a high figure by this tariff system, we have been reducing the living value of wages by permitting an almost unrestricted inflow of hoards of foreigners. These immigrants coming as they have at the rate of not far from 500,000 male workmen per year, have brought with them the low standards of living which we tried to shut out by the tariff, they have come into competition with our American workmen, pounded down the rate of wages until we now have the satisfaction of knowing that not far from 10,000,000 of our population are underfed, under-clothed, and poorly housed. 5,000,000 of our women, who should be making homes, and caring for our children, must work to assist in supplying the necessities of life; 2,000,000 have to work in factories. In addition to this, not far from 1,700,000 children from six to fifteen years of age have to work to assist in supporting the family. This is the way we have protected the American workmen and his home, that in his life he might bear witness to the truth. Do I hear the sound of your voice making its strong and effective protest? Are you, who believe that the spirit of the living God dwelleth in the soul of man, giving vent to a righteous indignation that should stir your very being?

But let me speak of one more fact. Another result of this betrayal of the honor and the integrity of the American nation

is the fact that about 50% of our families are propertyless. They have no reserve power, nothing to fall back on. True indeed it is that they have followed the teaching of Christ and have not laid up for themselves treasures upon earth where moth and rust may consume, and where thieves break through and steal. But there is a bitter irony in the fact [that] they are deprived of the compensating satisfaction of taking no thought for tomorrow. Because they have no property, because their wages have been pounded down to a rate that is lower than a living wage, these men have become victims of a rapacious class of tenement house owners and landlords. This last class thinks that they have the moral right, as they have had the legal right, to take advantage of the grim necessity of the workman when he is down, and extort from the last fathering in rent. He thinks that he has the right to create in our midst places unsanitary, and dangerous from whence come all kinds of physical disease and immoral refuse. Do you not see that all this is more hideous than the cruel ravages of war?

For many years people have felt the pressure of this problem as they first approached it, the full extent of its significance did not appear. With good intention and a clean motive many high-minded people have given, to relieve the intensity of the suffering others, have given their lives to work among these fruits of our industrial prosperity. In the evolution of their efforts simple personal charity has given way to attempts at education. These have given way to an organized and systematic effort to get back at the causes of the conditions and the effect preventative measures. Discouraging experience of the most efficient and wise workers have taught us at least a few lessons.

The first lesson learned is this. Charity, however clean-motivated has been the giver, is not only inadequate to meet these conditions, but it is unjust to the victim of our rapacity, to shove him penniless out of our front door, and then ask him to eat the crumbs of our table as we throw them out of the back door. Indeed it has come to such a pass that one with any sense of moral justice blushes with shame at the very mention of charity.

This has been called a generation of pity. We have awakened to something of a sense of the cruelty and the immorality involved in these conditions. Out of that pity people have given

generously towards the immediate relief of the suffering. Settlement houses have been established, children have even been taken from the filthy conditions of the city for a week or two in the country. Reforms of various kinds have been effected, and as a reactionary or giving expression to our feelings of pity, we have learned that we must go deeper than we ever have gone before, we reach the bottom of that well of poison that we wish to clean out. But most of all, we have learned that the simple feeling of pity and the blind effort to relieve the object of our pity are but the feelings of the ignorant child in dealing with these conditions. Pity is an untrained and uneducated and undisciplined impulse. But take that same feeling of pity, and let it be trained by experience, let it become educated by contact with the real conditions, let it become disciplined in the fiery furnace of facts, and behold it is developed into justice. Our impulse to pity, which we cast upon the waters, has come back to us crying for justice. That is the greatest of all that has been learned by the year of dealing with these problems.

Now justice demands that the interests of human life are of greater importance than the making of money and the amassing of fortunes. Contributions to charity, public and private gifts but make the more reprehensible and damnable that a fortune may be amassed by one who takes advantage of the defenseless condition of men and sucks from their almost lifeless body the last drop of self-respecting blood, and then casts into the lap of public charity for burial. The prevailing indifference that allows man to be either directly or indirectly a party to such conduct and not feel the sting of a severe rebuke and a righteous indignation that shall make him feel his own meanness, shall disappear. The issue is between the right of human beings and the power of wealth. There is no doubt as to the outcome. Whenever the question of the worth of the human soul has ever come into conflict with any other alleged wealth, the right of man has won. The whole range of history is strewn with the wrecks of one form or another that has asserted its right to trample upon the soul of man and maintain its supremacy because of its strength. But no sooner is the right asserted than the indomitable spirit of man that believes implicitly in its right and its function to bear witness to the eternal truth has brushed aside the threatening structure, and burned its ruin in the heat of righteous wrath. Such will be the result of this

conflict between the right of wealth and the eternal right of the human personality.

It is simply our task to assert the moral principle, to take part in the establishment of it as a part of our accepted code of morals. We shall accomplish this by virtue of our right of moral insistence. Regardless of what men may say, we shall still declare that man must be the first consideration. We must unite in the work of effective legislation that shall embody the practical and concrete application of this principle. We shall whip into line the reluctant few who still think that they have the right to live by drinking the lifeblood of men, women and children. It will be necessary to agitate, to educate, and to legislate. We must know the conditions, we must see, and feel, the great forces of human life, the eternal principles of right and wrong that are involved. High above the worth [of] things or institutions, high above the joys and delights of pleasure, even so high that its top is lost in the infinite, place your conception of the worth of the human soul. And as you feel the deeper meaning of the task of our times, and the fire of righteous purpose burns away the dross of your life, and kindles in your being a sane and well-guided devotion to the deeper duties of, and the deeper opportunities for, service to humanity, you will come to know the truth and the truth shall make you free. When in your search for knowledge you have gone back to the root of the matter, you will see, I am sure, that so long as we, that we may satisfy our greed and rapacity, not only permit, but virtually compel men to work for less than a living wage, we must reap the fruit of our corruption. You will furthermore see that there is one principle that we must adopt as the fundamental moral principle of business life. You will see that it is not a mean, narrow, short-sighted opinion of a visionary, but that it is a far-sighted, broad, humane, and essentially sound proposition that will foster healthy business conditions, both for employer and for employee, that it will nurture the best and the richest life both in the individual and in society. You will see, also that it expresses both the economic, and the moral and the social unrest of our time. When you have thought it over you will see, I am sure, that in whatever you may be doing, whether in seeking for knowledge, or in putting your knowledge into action, your guiding principle, your one essential truth that shall stand out clear amid all the details, is expressed in these words, "A good living wage, or no business." Far deep down in the mind of every man lurks the

feeling that it belongs to every human soul to repeat as the expression of his own right and purpose in life. To this end have I been born and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Is it not true that as long as one in ten of our population is underfed, under-clothed, and poorly housed, they cannot bear full witness to the truth? Is it not also true that so long as one in ten of the hundred are out of the fold we are not bearing witness to the truth?