

# The Forgotten Man

John Chamberlain

He's the one from whom the money  
is taken to subsidize the others

A NATION begins to decline when it neglects its own classics. But no trend is necessarily permanent, and classics can come back. Take the case of William Graham Sumner's *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other*, for example. Published originally in 1883, this little classic of individualism was long unavailable to the general reader. But in the last few years, it has been made available by several different organizations.

*What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* has had the strangest of histories. It was written at a time when the fallacies of Welfare State thinking were just beginning to take hold in America. A professor of economics at Yale in the early Eighties, Sumner sensed the oncoming socialistic deluge when it was the merest trickle. He could hardly know in 1883 that Edward Bellamy was already meditating in Boston on the notions of the Utopian socialists, and getting ready to write his *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, a book which does its

best to suffuse the idea of the regimented slave state with a romantic glow. He could hardly have been aware that out in Chicago young Henry Demarest Lloyd was predicting (in the *Chicago Tribune*, of all places) that "the unnatural principles of the competitive economy of John Stuart Mill will be as obsolete as the rules of war by which Caesar slaughtered the fair-haired men, women and children of Germania." Nor could he have known that in Indiana, Socialist Eugene V. Debs was taking his first flier in politics, as city clerk of Terre Haute. Yet Sumner felt in his bones that the world of his youth was about to shift on its axis. Faith in individualism was weakening; Sumner knew it from reading the accounts of speeches in the papers. The willingness of the Gilded Age plutocracy to accept government favors in the form of tariffs also impressed him as a sign of decadence; no free society, as he well knew, could be built on hypocrisy.

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A PROFOUND student of veering social currents, Sumner set his face uncompromisingly against the rising Welfare State principles of the New Day. The record of history told him that the Welfare State inevitably becomes the Illfare State. In *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* Sumner tried to underscore the lesson of history by bringing simple arithmetic to bear on the Welfarists' proposition. The state, as Sumner said, is All-of-Us organized to protect the rights of Each-of-Us. But when Some-of-Us try by political manipulation to live off Others-of-Us, rights necessarily go out the window. In Sumner's estimation the type and formula of most Welfare — or Illfare — State schemes come down to this: A and B put their heads together to decide what C shall be made to do for D. The vice of such scheming is that C is never consulted in the matter; he is simply clubbed by the police power of the state into diverting a part of his earnings to someone he has never seen. C is very likely a most responsible citizen; he is generally the type of person who supports himself uncomplainingly, sees to it that his children are educated, and contributes to the voluntary charities of his neighborhood. If C has any surplus over what it takes to live and provide for his children and his locality, he generally saves

it and invests it, thereby adding to the capital equipment by which the nation's standard of living is maintained and raised.

Sumner called C the Forgotten Man. The phrase was doubly prophetic; for by a most ironical sequel Franklin D. Roosevelt picked it up in the Nineteen-thirties and applied it, not to Sumner's C, but to Sumner's D. This simple act of misappropriation, which made C more forgotten than ever, did much to get the Welfare State notions of the New Deal accepted by a troubled nation. Misapplied or not, there's nothing like a good phrase backed by a golden voice to win votes.

THE ATTEMPTED rehabilitation of D at the expense of C never even really served its alleged purpose of helping D. It is written in the arithmetic books of the seventh grade that D is hurt, not helped, when A and B scheme to mulct C of the fruits of his toil. Now it cannot be that Americans have actually forgotten their seventh-grade arithmetic; they have merely ceased to apply it to their thinking on social matters. Any child ought to be able to see that if C has, let us say, \$3000, it will buy just \$3000 worth of goods and no more. Let us say that A and B take \$1000 of C's money to spend on D. Some of the \$1000 must be used to support the

sterile machinery of state collection, bookkeeping, and redistribution. But after the politicians and their office-holding dependents have taken their cut of the \$1000, D gets some of the money. In the natural course of events he uses it — to consume. What is left to C of the original \$3000 also goes largely into consumption; there simply isn't enough left of the total to enable C to save anything out for investment. So under Welfare politics there is no addition out of the \$3000 to the capital stock of the nation. Thus, because of the schemings of A and B allegedly in behalf of D, the industrial system does not expand. The upshot of this is that D is prevented from getting a job. He remains at the mercy of A and B, who continue to take it out on C.

Since A and B are of the predatory type of do-gooder who insists on being unselfish with other people's money, they are not likely to get around to taking a refresher course in seventh-grade arithmetic. But if D has any pride at all, he must someday begin to apply what he learned in the seventh grade to his own social plight. Does he want forever to remain a ward of A and B, getting a continually decreasing portion of consumer goods as the population grows and presses against the limits of a static industrial system? Wouldn't

it be far better for him to throw in his lot with C in an effort to expand the capital plant and so create a productive niche for himself in society?

The reason why D has not been able to see that his welfare depends on making a common front with C is that A and B have learned to delude him with inflationary tricks. A and B are always pointing out that the "gross national product" is up by so many billions of dollars over the product of ten years ago. What they do not bother to tell D is that the value of the dollar has been debauched, and that it is no longer a good measuring stick for anything. It is true enough that the gross national product of the United States has continued to increase. Despite the scheming of A and B, the Forgotten Man has been able to squeeze out some money for investment even after he has paid most of his savings out to support D. But by all the logic of arithmetic the United States would be far richer today in capital equipment if Franklin Roosevelt had made the correct identification of William Graham Sumner's Forgotten Man. If C had been left unmolested, there would be more for everybody.

SUMNER is usually thought of as a heartless logician, a basically uncharitable man. *What Social*

*Classes Owe to Each Other* is, however, almost Biblical in its understanding of the "law of sympathy." At the very best, says Sumner, one of us fails in one way and another in another, "if we do not fail altogether." It will not do to condone failure abstractly; but if a man happens to be pinned to earth by a fallen tree, it is scarcely appropriate to his immediate predicament to deliver him a lecture on carelessness. True, the man may have been careless; but a lecture won't get the tree off his leg. Amid the chances and perils of life, says Sumner, men owe to other men their aid and sympathy. But aid and sympathy must operate in the field of private and personal relationships under the regulation of reason and conscience. If men trust to the state to supply "reason and conscience," they so deaden them-

selves that the "law of sympathy" ceases to operate anywhere. Men who shrug off their personal obligations become hard and unfeeling, and it is small wonder then that they are entirely willing to go along with hard and unfeeling politics. It is when he decides to "let the state do it" that the humanitarian ends up by condoning the use of the guillotine for the "betterment" of man.

SO FAR as I am aware, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* is not used as a text in any college in the country. If it is reprinted often enough, however, the time will come when it will make its way back to the campus. Students are curious even when they are deluded and misled; and when books are available, students will find their way to them.

William Graham Sumner's *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other*, 146 pages, paper-bound, may be secured from FEE, Irvington-on-Hudson, N. Y., \$1.25 each.

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"The opposite of civilization is not barbarism but Utopia. Utopia can let no man be his own worst enemy, take the risk of going uninsured, gamble on the horses or on his own future, go to Hell in his own way. It has to concern itself more with the connection of the parts than with the separateness of the parts. It has to know where everyone is; it has to keep track of us. It can't protect us unless it directs us."

ROBERT FROST, from "The Listener," August 26, 1954

He who relies upon state protection must pay for it by limitations on liberty; by every new demand which he makes on the state, he increases its functions and the burden of it on himself.

WILLIAM GRAHAM SUMNER

# The Cow In The Apartment

*Burton Rascoe*

Helping yourself is one of the  
best possible ways to help others

HAVEN'T YOU at one time or another remarked, or heard, without protest, a friend remark: "Radio and TV would be all right if it weren't for the commercials," or "He used to be a pretty good writer, but he is turning out nothing but commercial stuff nowadays," or "Commerce and religion don't mix well," or "It's the commercial angle that is tied in with the project that I object to"?

If so, have you ever realized that every one of those expressions and others like them are nothing whatever but displays and airings of baseless and rather vulgar snobbery?

We are all — every single one of us — engaged in trade. Trade is our way of helping ourselves and others.

The man who deposits a bottle full of milk before my apartment door every morning is in trade, even though he belongs to a driver's union; and his being in trade is a way of helping me and others. Since I live in an apartment in the

city, I can't keep a cow handy, even if I knew how to milk her. Even if it were possible for me to keep a cow in the apartment, the cow would produce more milk than I can use. I couldn't stop milking her; for if I did, she would go dry. I would have an unproductive cow on my hands in an apartment, and the cost of feeding and cleaning up after her would be great. If I tried to get back some of the cost by selling the surplus, I would have to go into business, buy bottles and sterilizing and pasteurizing chemicals and equipment, solicit customers, keep books, keep publicly displayed the O.P.A. milk prices, file and pay quarterly income taxes, get, display, and keep paid up on, the necessary licenses, submit to regular federal, state, and municipal food and hygiene inspection, promptly report all symptoms of hoof-and-mouth disease, ticks or other cow afflictions, dun my delinquent customers, and Lord knows what all — and the surplus milk from one cow would cost me X-dol-

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