

Can it be doubted that such a system would be conducive to the ends of justice?

One day after court hours a teamster entered a Cleveland court room and asked for a word with the judge. He was ill at ease and rather awestricken amid the impressive surroundings of the august temple of justice. The kindly interest of the judge brought him more assurance and he came directly to the point.

"I want a divorce in a hurry," he said.

When asked for his reason he answered:

"My wife don't love me any more. She hardly ever cooks breakfast and don't talk to me much."

The judge explained the expense and formality necessary. But the man was not to be so easily dissuaded. He said he had the money and wanted to be sent to a lawyer. A long informal talk followed. The facts of the case revealed themselves. The couple had been married less than two years. For a few months all had gone well. A child was expected before long. The case was plain. The simple-minded man could not appreciate what the young wife had to endure. Hence her fretfulness and his counter resentment.

"Go home!" said the judge. "Take her a box of candy and some flowers. Then report to me tomorrow and tell me what she does."

The next day the mood of the teamster was completely changed. His happy countenance told an eloquent story.

"Much obliged, judge," he said. "She kissed me."

What the service of the judge meant in this instance to a simple-minded man cannot be measured. An immediate need had been met by a natural expedient. Similar application of common sense if applied generally would cut in half the rich harvest of the divorce lawyer. The court through its intercession would introduce peace where dissension now prevails and build where it now destroys. Nor would the litigant be the only beneficiary. By making the courts a place for human service, unfettered by formal procedure and speaking the language of simple truth, we shall go far toward giving them their true place in the community.

MANUEL LEVINE.

RAYMOND MOLEY.

CORRESPONDENCE

Pleads for Laissez-Faire

SIR: You are doing a great work at a critical time in American history, but I believe it would be even more effective if your pages were not so hermetically sealed to the views of that large body of opinion who believe that the "laissez-faire laissez-passar" policy has never had a genuine and full trial and that it would be a calamity for this country to follow European radicals in seeking refuge in regulation and state control, until the curative power of genuine freedom has been tested.

It is not easy to put what I mean into a few words, without omitting necessary qualifying statements, but relying on your sympathetic comprehension, I will attempt it. The tendency under present conditions for wages to go down to the lowest point at which population will consent to maintain itself constitutes the fundamental justification for trade unionism with all of its results—good and bad. This tendency (of wages to fall under free competition) is explained in the orthodox political economy by the doctrine of diminishing returns. This view seemed also in accord with the view that joy was not of this world and that the division of mankind into masses and classes was a final expression of God's will. This doctrine no longer accords with our religious or social ideals and the doctrine of diminishing returns has for the time-being, at any rate, been repealed through the application of science to agriculture and industry. In the animal kingdom, more food means increased numbers; and this tendency to have large families continues even with mankind wherever the child is a source of profit, but is reversed in the families of the well-to-do. There the child is given wider education and greater opportunity for development and becomes a burden financially and personally. If culture and comfort could

be the lot of all there seems reason to believe the danger of excessive population would be entirely overcome.

You will not have failed to notice that I am suggesting nothing less than the possibility that a community may exist in which competition, even among laborers, might not be inconsistent with a scale of wages—rising with every important application of science to production, and really representing the laborers' fair share of the total product. Such a scale of wages would soon make of the laborer the owner of the greater part of the capital of the country; and what more natural than that laborers would invest in the factories in which they work and thereby secure a control of their industry which would be more effective than any control which state socialism would make possible.

I realize that this seems too good to be true and that the wise men of the world have lost the hope of finding evidence of design in social structure or of the reign of law where now all seems confusion. But the kind of world I have suggested would be exactly the one the Father to whom Jesus prayed, would have made. Some of us still believe that is the sort of world we actually are living in—and that the task of man is to cease interfering with the free play of God's laws dealing with the production and distribution of wealth instead of establishing restrictions.

As Columbus went in search of a land he had never seen and finding it, solved for a time, and in an unexpected manner, many of the economic difficulties of Europe, may it not be we can find a solution of much that daunts us by a further reliance on the principles of freedom? I am not suggesting a remedy but a direction in which it may be worth while for men of good will to look for one.

BOLTON SMITH.

Memphis, Tennessee.

Books and Things

I HAVE never been able to understand the reasoning of those kind-hearted people who from time to time recommend, seemingly in all seriousness, the subsidizing of the deserving poor among American authors. As a writer my mouth waters at the thought of it, but I cannot with a clear conscience urge it. One's humanity would be torn in two by the problem presented in its application. To clothe a naked author would be an act of personal kindness; it would also be, very likely, an act of public cruelty. If, for example, a committee of the Academy of Arts and Letters were to set out regularly to rescue all the mute, inglorious Miltons, the result while pleasing to the Miltons might be exceedingly disagreeable to everybody else owing to the committee's probable taste in Miltons. How do these wise men know that a committee for saving more authors from starvation would really be any better for the literary situation than a committee for causing more authors to starve, or that a committee for endowing authors to continue writing would work out more desirably than a committee that endowed them to stop?

I say committee, of course, because we always carry out by committee anything in which any one of us alone would be too reasonable to persist. Alone, after a few trials, one would probably come to his senses, but in a committee we come to one another's senses, which is merely a convivial manner of going out of our own. It is not that the plan looks merely to the preservation of an author as a man. It looks to his continuance as an author. Mad decisions of this sort could be taken only in committee.

It is different with other occupations. Toward bank-clerks, for instance, one could be coöperatively human without endangering to any great extent the mental lives of other people. A "nation-wide" bank-clerk life-saving service would be no more invidious or unreasonable than many other civic bodies now existing, and it might perhaps with safety go further than simply pulling bank-clerks out of water and drying them. It might even take measures to aid them to return to bank-clerking. Even a committee could probably tell not only whether a bank-clerk ought to live but whether he ought to be a bank-clerk.

But suppose seven novelists, while looking for a democratic "urge," fall into the Harlem River, and are drawn out by some committee on the conservation of deserving fiction. Beyond the work of complete resuscitation the committee obviously has no right to go. To restore those novelists warmed and comforted to their respective families, without regard to the quality of their literary work, is defensible on grounds of common humanity. It pertains to the preservation of human life. But one step beyond that point, one single measure for aiding and abetting any or all of them in the writing of novels would carry the committee into a subtle and dubious domain requiring fine, far-seeing discriminations such as no American committee on any subject has ever been known to possess. It pertains to the preservation of a literary life. The bodies of those seven novelists, whirling in the tide underneath the arches of High Bridge, would be, I admit, a pathetic sight, no matter what they had written. But only so long as they were regarded merely as men. If they were regarded exclusively as novelists and from a strictly literary point of view, the occasion might be almost joyous. So little can one say in any long view of the matter whether their survival as active novelists would do more good than harm to the human spirit. One man's life may be dearly purchased

at the price of ten thousand ennui. I do not deny that the committee might do literature a service by hitting once and again on the right novelist to conserve; but so might a lightning-stroke by killing the right one. Why add one blind chance to another in the hope of coming out straight in this rather delicate affair?

Or take a case which would seem to me wholly deserving and in which I ought certainly to sympathize with the subsidizing point of view. Having nearly finished my book on "The Religion of Inexperience," a constructive work in moral eradication, written with energy and vision, seizing posterity's thought by the forelock but transcending somewhere the mental powers of my contemporaries, I appear one morning with my six starving children at the Anne Street Headquarters of the Rockefeller Committee on Indoor Literary Relief. It turns out better than I could have hoped. Not only am I tided over my present difficulties, but three weeks later there is a meeting of two college presidents, a professor of sociology, a writer of a successful novel, an historian, and the director of a bank, and out of the confluence of these six intellects there comes, as indeed anything might come, a decision in my favor.

"The Religion of Inexperience" is achieved, published in four volumes, respectfully considered. I find people polite and not unwilling to admit that I may be passing on to posterity. As I have the reputation of writing over everybody's head, giants arise from time to time and say they understand me and from my own point of view and that of several others the world has gained a great deal. Yet if I apply in an unselfish spirit the law of literary probabilities the odds seem to run the other way. The other things I might have done better are so numerous. At no stage of the whole affair, for example, has there been the slightest indication that God did not really mean me for a plumber or that that was not the true reason why I almost starved. Had I starved a little longer, I might in desperation or moved by some wayward impulse have begun to plumb, discovered a real passion and talent for the art, earned my own living by it instead of by puzzling people to no purpose, and so the ending would have been much happier all around. Misplacements of this sort are always occurring in letters, and committees do not readjust them.

We seem to be as much at sea in this matter as they were about 120 A.D., when the critic cursed the town for keeping alive so many poets and cursed it again for starving so many of them; wanted to know how a man could behold the horses of the chariot of the sun if he had to grub for a living, and wanted to drive most poets back to grubbing for a living as soon as he observed their manner of beholding the horses of the chariot of the sun; said you ought to fatten poets to make them sing, and became violently angry the moment a fat poet began singing; blamed a rich man for feeding a pet lion instead of subsidizing some author at much less expense, and was all for feeding the author to the lion on reading what he wrote. He wanted authors protected, but the literary choices made by the protector almost drove him mad. Juvenal, of course, was wholly unreasonable, but his state of mind corresponded quite exactly to the confusion of the case, and the confusion is still with us. He had no solution but the lame one that Caesar should select and subsidize the author, and he had already completely damned the average Caesar. But Caesar certainly seemed to be just as good a solution as any of those modern monsters with five respectable pairs of legs under a round table; those headless decapods that we call upon nowadays as committees to do our dubious jobs.

FRANK M. COLBY.