Mr. Ford's Page

WHO is the Producer? It is really an important question in these days of revised thinking, because there is growing up a new class-conscious aristocracy which calls itself "the producers," and is very exclusive of everyone else. It is, of course, a good sign that emphasis is being placed on production and that a new appreciation has come for the producer; and perhaps it is natural that a kind of class pride should grow up which would limit the right to wear that honorable name; but all this makes it the more necessary that we should be clear in our minds as to who the Producer really is.

The most common description of the Producer would lead us to believe that he is the man from whose hands comes the finished product. We are easily deceived on this point. This man, we say, makes horseshoes. He produces something useful. He is thus a valuable member of society. We can see his work, we can see him perform it, we can see how it serves the immediate needs of the community. Therefore we have no hesitancy in awarding him the title of Producer.

But behind that man are others whom we do not see. There is the miner who dug out the iron ore. There is the mule-driver who transported the ore to the mine shaft. There is the engineer who hoisted it to the top. There are the men who handled it in the smelter. There are the other men who sailed the ships that carried it to the steel mills. Then in the steel mills it passed through the hands of many men who transformed it into steel; and there were railroad men and truckmen who carried it to the place where material was needed. Finally there was the blacksmith who with his brawny arm and practiced eye shaped it into the article that was needed—a rod, a brace, or a horseshoe.

When you actually trace any article of use through the numerous hands that worked upon it, and then attempt to divide the price of the article among those various men, you not only get an idea of the vast co-operation which production involves, but also how quantity production is the only method by which a low price to the purchaser and an adequate wage to the producer can be maintained.

During this process of tracing, you would also come upon another fact which is often overlooked; you would become aware of a very considerable body of workers whose hands did not directly touch the product at all, but whose whole work was in serving the Producers during the time they were actually engaged in the work of production. We are not now speaking of the various forms of service rendered to the Producers outside the shop, but that service which is rendered them inside the shop.

Take the shop sweepers, for example. They never touch the product of the shop. To the careless eye they are not producing anything at all. They are mere "extras," so to speak. Many would indignantly deny them the title of Producers.

Yet they serve the processes of production in an indispensable way. Sweeping the shop has a direct bearing on the production of the special article which the shop exists to make. For example, an accumulation of waste would hinder production in two ways; first, the waste itself would get in the workers' way; second, to get it out of his way the worker would have to leave his job and go sweeping.

Now, when the sweeper goes through his appointed section of floor space with his broom, he is clearing the way for the worker, he is allowing the worker to continue straight on with his job, unhindered.

Again, the sweeper serves the worker in a still more indirect yet important way: cleanliness of the shop brings sanitary benefits with it, and so the sweeper serves the workers' health, and through it, production, by cutting down lost time due to illness.

PERHAPS the most subtle service the sweeper renders is a psychological one. A clean shop has an influence on the men. They become more clean-cut in their own work. Wherever you see a shop cluttered up with a mass of waste, or with materials dumped around anywhere in disorderly fashion, you will find that the workmen's minds become cluttered too; they partake of the general disorderliness. Now, the sweeper has worked for weeks and months and has not touched a single process of what we call production, and yet he has served the Producer and aided production.

If the man whom we call the Producer had been compelled to stop and do his own sweeping, he would have drawn the same rate of pay for handling a broom as was given him for the skilled use of a tool. It would have been a waste of skill. The sweeper relieved him of that necessity, and so made it possible to keep the mechanical skill where it was most needed.

And because the sweeper is thus a contributor to production through rendering service to the more direct Producer, it is believed that he is entitled to a wage that recognizes his value. That is why the minimum wage, which always ought to be high enough to support a very creditable standard of living, should include the sweepers also, or any other similar workers whose efforts contribute to the general work of production.

Are we going to deny the name of Producer to those whose services are a part of the immediate producer's services?

That is just what is sometimes done. There is a sort of an aristocracy of skill growing up. There is an exclusiveness which would shut out the contributors to production from the status and rewards of Producers. It is rather strange to see these divisions arise, and to see how the urge of human pride always makes for separateness among men. There are others, of course, beside the sweepers, who serve the immediate Producers of articles of use. The man who plans the work, who makes it possible for the Producer to begin the job at once instead of waiting to lay it out and plan it ahead—he, too, has his part in production.

EVERYBODY bows to the Producer. But who is he? Is he the man who puts the final touches on an article and "turns it out"—or is he any man who anywhere along the whole line has had a necessary hand in production? Is the shop sweeper a producer? Is the manager? The non-producer is being challenged today; it is therefore desirable to know who is entitled to the name of Producer.

THEN, before any of these came upon the scene at all, there is the man who had vision enough and faith enough to win the necessary means to start the work going in the first place: the man whose credit or whose idea was good enough to secure capital and machinery and a place to work. Surely it will not be denied that he, too, had his part in Production—that he served Production and the Producer, too.

The difficulty has been in the past very similar to that which confronts us now, namely, a tendency on the part of one group to minimize the importance of the other group, as if that were the only way to secure its own importance.

Our enormous and insistent demand for the finished product has, in these days, given an exaggerated prominence to the man who does the finishing. The last man to handle the article is the first man the public sees, and thus he is the one who is most often given the title of Producer.

The man who "turns it out" is the man whom modern opinion acclaims as the real creator.

And yet it must be clear to all that this man could not "turn it out" unless a whole series of processes had produced it to his hand almost ready to be "turned out."

When all is said and done, it is the organization that produces, and no individual worker. And by "organization" is meant not only the specific shop which makes the specific article, but the whole industrial process, from those which deal with the raw materials of the earth, to those that give the finishing touches which prepare the worked material for the market and for use.

They are all part of the plan. It may be that some of the processes could be shortened up a little; it may be that profiteers push in here and there to collect an unwarranted tax on the completed article as it passes along the channels of commerce; but aside from these, which can easily be remedied, it will be found that the actual shaping of the article occupies a place about midway in the whole process of Production. It is not the whole. It is indispensable, of course; but it is not warranted in assuming a lordly dominance over all the others.

Certainly there is no place in a just and well-regulated world for any labor that does not in some measure contribute to Production. This is not to take a sordid view of life, but only to insist on usefulness in the things which we support. Every man who eats and wears clothes and enjoys creature comforts, does so at the expense of someone else's labor. Now, he ought to yield an adequately useful return for what he receives—that is the principle.