



Mr. Ford's Page



WHEN a man deals in theories it is very easy for him to exaggerate, because a world that is spun out of fancy can be more easily rearranged than a world of throbbing, driving life. Men find it easy to rear Utopia in their dreams, and make changes overnight that would dislocate the whole human race if they were decreed in a real world. But when we are dealing with real days and actual conditions we find that our very life is so bound up in the conditions which surround us—as the life of the body inheres in its organs—that sudden and total changes, which are fortunately impossible, would be fatal if

they were possible. The danger of our dream-worlds is that they influence us too greatly in discounting the real world in which we live. On the whole it is not a bad world, as practically everybody will admit. It is not perfect by any means; it will stand much retouching here and there, much adjustment and improvement; but on the whole even the most ordinary mind is able to see that what we have is infinitely better than it might be, infinitely better than some of the systems which are now being proposed by men whose minds would be clearer if they worked for their living.

Every man with red blood in his veins will agree that whatever else we may desire, we do not desire a world that will leave no elbowroom for individual initiative and ambition.

No man would wish to place his son in a school where the lad would not be required to meet things that would test his qualities and develop his powers. He would not want his son coddled. He would want him to take boy's luck with the rest of the boys, learn by the friction generated by rubbing against hard tasks and other people's natures. He would want for his son such a discipline as would render him a self-reliant man.

And, when we take time to think of it, that is just the kind of world we ask for ourselves. We don't want to be supported by government, clothed by legislature, and apportioned our work and reward by commissary; we don't ask to live in houses furnished us by the state, fed on fixed ration, and educated according to certain schedules fixed for the various classes of society.

What the normal man wants is a free field and no favorites, a chance to show what is in him, and take the measure of success and reward that he is able to win. For that is Freedom in the economic sense. Some people talk as if economic freedom meant liberation from the necessity of toil, but as food itself means toil, and as food is a necessity, that view is clearly wrong. Freedom means an opportunity to go out with other men, working with them in co-operation, and alongside them in friendly competition, so that every man shall have the chance to demonstrate his ability.

That is what gives life its zest, and any social program that takes that zest out of life is foredoomed to failure even before it is tried. Indeed, it never will be tried, because the healthy zest of human nature is against it from the beginning.

What we want for our boys is what we ask for ourselves—free opportunity on the field of endeavor, a fair chance to measure powers with other men, and may the best man win!

NOW, when we have tried this opportunity for a number of years it is inevitable that we settle into the classifications which our abilities, our use of our opportunities, and our general value to society, fix for us. That is the only classification possible. Each man eventually finds his own place. He finds his own work. He is rewarded according to the contribution he makes to the general welfare.

There is nothing arbitrary about it. It is not done by legislation nor by the pressure of group interests. It is purely natural in its operation. Cotton goes into cloth and iron goes into dredges; there is no discrimination; there is only classification by fitness.

But the contest of life leaves a certain proportion of human beings very low in the economic scale, and this constitutes the largest item in our social problem.

This residuum near the bottom has heretofore been waste

material to a very large extent. We have been just as wasteful of men as we have of certain materials. For generations we have been throwing away what we called the "waste" of mines and the "rubbish" and "garbage" of cities. But we have now awakened to their value and are making them useful and therefore valuable. In the same way we have been counting certain classes of unskilled individuals as waste. Humanity's scrap-heap has at times been very large. But modern industry has turned all this waste humanity to new and increased usefulness, thus making these classes of men more valuable to themselves and society.

It was not so much a matter of "man's inhumanity to man," as it was society's lack of managerial ability to use the naturally less useful classes, which led to the sad spectacle of "a human scrap-heap." Modern industry went to that scrap-heap and found good useful stuff, and today even the unskilled man can feel that he is playing his part in the making of the world. The man of initiative, ability, and energy has always been able to take care of himself. He has asked no favors and has agitated no new form of society. The problem has always been the other man who must be helped to help himself.

That man is receiving more of the material of self-help today than at any time in human history. He counts for something.

He is necessary to the work of the world. Productive processes have been so standardized that his steadiness is as good an asset as genius, and his labor as prime an investment as capital.

EVERY red blooded man wants a try-out in life. He wants a fair field and no favor. But if he does not make top notch, that does not mean he should be thrown on the human scrap-heap. Keep industry free enough to give every man a chance to be the best success he can; but keep industry fair and just enough to prevent men becoming abject failures. Profit sharing does this.

AND still more will be done for him. He has not only been given a place in the world; he will be given a share in the wealth he helps to create over and above that share which comes to him as wages. He will participate in the "extras"; he will be enabled to count his connection with his job not only on the basis of the day's wage, but of the year's bonus and dividend. All this is made possible not by a soft sentimentalism, but by new methods of production and new genius for management which have given value to the work of these formerly discounted groups of men.

There is a theory that profit-sharing is impracticable because it is not balanced by loss-sharing, that a full partnership between capital and labor would involve a sharing of the risks as well as the benefits.

The theory is faulty at several points. Whatever profit a business shows is produced by labor in conjunction with efficient management, and labor is therefore clearly entitled to a share. Moreover, the losses, whether caused by ill-management, depression or other conditions which are still beyond control, are certain to be shared by labor, whether it will or no.

But why expect losses at all? Why should a business which supplies a legitimate need of the people, ever suffer from lack of work at a profitable figure? Eliminate the speculative element, contribute efficient management, give honest labor on an honest product at an honest price, and you have established business on a substantial basis, at the minimum of risk.

Labor and management are partners—if both be efficient, the results are as certain as human affairs can be. Management furnishes the method, labor furnishes the medium; both together spell service; service is the basis of reward; and upon the basis of honest reward, prosperity is built.

With capital making the first move toward fairness and equality, there is bound to be a receptive spirit on the part of labor, and a revision of some of the old prejudices and misconceptions. After all, we are only human—all of us; and a real man can always sense the note of sincerity, or its absence, in another's proffer of friendship.

The sincere desire of the manufacturer to be just to his men and to the public must result in a tide of loyalty rolling in to meet, augment and solidify the new spirit which is coming into industrial relations.