

## 132 EARTH HUNGER AND OTHER ESSAYS

liberty. It is supposed that the Anarchists carry it to some exaggeration, but there is no apparent rule for drawing the line to discriminate the error from the truth, and there is no dispute about the truth of the conception itself.

I shall presently return to this point and try to show that no such notion of liberty is warranted by history or philosophy. For my present purpose I wish to point out that men in a primitive or original state of society never enjoyed any such condition of liberty. No conception of the primitive man could well be more false to history than that which thinks of him as free in any sense of the word. The notion does not fit him at all. It is in the highest degree incongruous, because the whole conception of liberty in any sense is a product of civilization, and what little unrestrainedness of action men now enjoy they owe to the conquests of civilization. There can be no such thing as liberty where there is not rational reflection and choice. Primitive and savage men live by instinct, custom, and tradition; there is no right of private judgment among them; a dissenter among them is crushed or exiled, when to be exiled is to be exposed to perish in isolation from human society.

If we turn our attention particularly to industrial or economic activities, do we find that, in a primitive stage of society, there was freedom in this domain? Do we find, as is so often asserted, that monopoly is a product of civilization, or of "capitalism," or that it is growing all the time? We certainly do not find any such thing.

Monopoly is in the order of nature. The relaxation of monopoly, and the introduction of the free play of effort, that is, of liberty and competition, is due to the growth of civilization. It seems to be believed by a great many of the popular writers of the day that there

not only was liberty in the primitive state of society, but that liberty did not then mean competition. There was not therefore, either monopoly or competition, but something else which has never been analyzed or defined. They seem to regard both competition and monopoly as products of civilization, and they denounce both at the same time. They also seem to think that monopoly and competition are at opposite poles, wide asunder, completely distinguishable.

Monopoly is a condition of things in which there is no scope for individual energy to be exerted so as to advance individual welfare, while competition is the state of things in which individual energy may be exerted so as to advance the welfare of the individual. These two combinations of social circumstances meet and to some extent intertwine; they are not separated by any gulf; in the middle ground where they meet, there are many cases which present mixtures of the two. We have limited monopolies with all degrees of limitation: almost all our railroads are limited monopolies; protected industries are monopolies which are limited in very various degrees, according as they are carried on by one, few, or many persons, making organization and combination easy or difficult.

In primitive states of society, monopoly prevails to such an extent that there is scarcely any scope at all for the application of individual energy to the effort for ameliorating one's position. It has been one of the longest and most painful achievements of civilization to open chances for the exertion of individual energy, and to give guarantees that the results of such exertion shall be secured to the one who made it. The progress in that direction within a hundred years has been enormous in proportion to any achievement in the same

## 134 EARTH HUNGER AND OTHER ESSAYS

direction in any earlier period. A century ago two men might have worked side by side at a loom; one might have been a man of the highest industrial talent, and the other lazy and inefficient; but the utmost difference of position to which they could attain, aside from vice or crime, was measured by the distance between a good and a bad hand-weaver. To-day the first would probably become a master of industry, a capitalist, and a millionaire, while the second might not be as well off now as then. The possible difference between them has therefore undergone an enormous widening. Napoleon and a private soldier were equal when each carried a gun in the ranks; but if each were put in command of a hundred thousand men, one would lead his army to slaughter, and the other would conquer a world with his.

In the case, however, of a modern captain of industry, a new natural monopoly has come in to take the place of the one which has been broken down — it is an interesting and instructive illustration of the constant recurrence of the monopoly principle. The master of industry has a monopoly in talent. He possesses the organizing and executive talent which is one of the rarest abilities that men ever possess, and the one talent which in our day, when industry is organized on a world-wide scale, on impersonal and automatic relations, is worth more than any other industrial factor. The men who have this talent are the ones on whom we all depend. There are millions of us who can do what we are told to do, but without the competent leadership of the masters of industry we should be as badly off as a great army of willing soldiers going into battle without competent generals. The executive talent is a natural monopoly; it has to be exploited under the methods of monopoly.

What men have done, therefore, in the course of civilization is this: they have broken down natural monopolies in the interest of free competitive effort. In the course of the development the natural elements have reappeared in new form, or new developments of the monopoly principle have presented themselves. These again have been modified or overcome, giving wider scope to liberty, but again producing fresh developments of monopoly, and so on until now. The reason why an artificial monopoly is so abominable is not only that it interferes to put some men down in order that others may rise at their expense, but that it is a working backward of the state machinery against that whole drift of civilization, which the state machine ought to fall in with and assist by constantly enlarging the fields of individual effort and modifying the play of natural monopoly by intelligent control.

It is a form of expression which lends itself to serious misapprehension, if we say of a certain natural fact that it is beneficent — a natural fact *is*, and that is the end of the matter, whether we men give it our sovereign approval or not. We have nothing to do with a natural fact except to note and accept its existence, and to govern ourselves accordingly. Still, when we note a natural fact we can often trace out its effects upon human interests, and perceive modes in which they are favorable or unfavorable to us. In that sense I hold that the above-mentioned play of monopoly for the reward of talent is beneficent. In other essays <sup>1</sup> I will examine a whole group of natural monopolies, to see if the same is true of them all, including that of land.

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 239 ff. below.