

discussed by reference to the primitive man, or the man in the state of nature; and so they must be discussed. The only difference is that we may depend for our notions of the primitive man and his ways either on speculation or on positive investigation. The eighteenth-century plan was to reach a notion of the primitive man by abstracting one after another the attributes of the civilized man, until a sort of residuum was obtained. It was thought that that must be what the original man in the state of nature was. Rousseau, in his "Reasons for the Inequalities Among Men," took the American Indian as his type of the primitive man; he took the notion of the red man as European travelers had described him before the middle of the eighteenth century, and, having rounded off the notion with some poetical additions, he went on to make his deductions as to civilization. He reached the result that the causes of social inequality were wheat and iron. To his imagination, the red men lived in blissful and Arcadian simplicity, and it was the introduction of agriculture, and the use of tools, which destroyed all that and introduced emulation, selfishness, and consequent inequality.

Rousseau has gone out of fashion, but his method and his ideas are repeated under a new form by the latest social speculators. But the error was not in seeking to find the origin of civilization or to compare the course of its development with the point of its beginning. Our latest science has to continue that effort; the origin of civilization has all the interest to us which belongs to the germs or beginnings of all great movements which we want to study. The wider the range of development which we can study, the more correct the knowledge which we obtain of it; modern scholars have therefore

138 EARTH HUNGER AND OTHER ESSAYS

devoted the most eager study to the facts of primitive society and the origin of civilization.

If, now, we use the information which we possess about the savage man to test the notion that he possessed natural liberty, we find that he was and is anything but free in the sense of being unrestrained. It might do for Rousseau to take the American Indian as a type of the primitive, or "original," or "natural" man, but we could not accept him as such. The Indian is far back in civilization when he is regarded from the stand-point of the civilized man; but if he is regarded with reference to the real and ultimate origin of society, he is very far on up the scale.

If, then, we take the notion of the Indian, or any man of lower civilization, as wandering freely and spending his time in blissful idleness, correct information shows that there are no facts to support it. A wandering savage wanders to get his living, and as a rule he finds it more than he can do; the exigencies of subsistence hold him as tightly as they hold a factory hand, and his success is far more uncertain. If he unites with others like himself in order, by organization, to increase his power, then he must submit to discipline of the most severe kind, enforced by penalties of the highest severity. Instead of being lawless he is under traditions and customs which admit of no relaxation whatever; he who tries to revolt against the tradition is thrust out into banishment or put to death. There is no such thing conceivable as private judgment or dissent. He who breaks a custom is an outlaw.

The noble savage may also wander out-of-doors, it is true, and within a certain range, within which he and his ancestors have bought, with their sufferings and blood, a knowledge of nature; but though he understands the

forces of nature very well, outside of that certain range everything in nature is a terror to him. His mythology bears witness to this. The civilized man is light and careless, or even merry in the face of nature, because he understands her so well; when nature, however, puts on her terrors or her mysteries, we quickly lose our spirits and come to feel our insignificance. Men to whom nature is always terrible or mysterious never win freedom in dealing with her.

The struggle of man to win his existence from nature is one which he begins with no advantages at all, but utterly naked and empty-handed. He has everything to conquer. Evidently it is only by his achievements that he can emancipate himself from the difficulties of his situation. His position, instead of furnishing a notion of liberty, furnishes an ideal of non-liberty; and liberty, instead of being a status at the beginning of civilization, appears rather to be a description of the sense and significance of civilization itself; that is, civilization has given us a measure of emancipation from the unlimited constraint and oppression under which mankind began.

Disease and old age are the most pitiless hardships of life, the ones in the face of which liberty is the greatest mockery. Even against these civilization has given us a great enlargement, but the savage man is helpless against them; old age comes on very early for him, on account of all the other hardships of his condition. The killing of old people by their children among savage tribes seems to us inexpressibly shocking, but this custom means something very different from the selfishness of the young; it testifies to the fact that the first liberty of all, the liberty to exist, becomes an unendurable burden to the savage man when he becomes old.

140 EARTH HUNGER AND OTHER ESSAYS

Now, it is a remarkable fact that if we confine our attention to that conception of liberty which consists in wild unrestraint, the realization of it is not found on any of the lowest stages of civilization at all, but on one which is comparatively high, *viz.*, the pastoral or nomadic stage; it is among the nomadic hordes of Central Asia or among the men of the Bedouin type that the wildest and most untamed form of personal liberty is to be found. Along with it, however, goes ferocity, the practise of plunder as a virtue, blood-thirstiness, and brutishness. Most remarkable of all, however, is the fact that slavery begins on this stage; it appears that men subjugated each other on the same stage on which they subjugated animals. If this observation is true (and although not completely established it has been accumulating evidence in its favor), then it is to be noted that the notion of wild, unrestrained, personal liberty found an approximate realization only when society was so differentiated that some could get this freedom because others had been reduced to servitude.

The notion that liberty was a primitive endowment of the race, which has been lost or stolen in the course of civilization, must be abandoned; study of primitive society shows that it is all false and unfounded. It is an exploded myth like the "state of nature" or the "social compact." We shall next see whether there can be liberty, in the sense of unconstraint, in civilization.

Who Is Free? Is It the Civilized Man?

A schoolboy looks through the window and wishes that the hours of restraint were over so that he could run free; he regards with envy the animals which run "at liberty" and the birds which fly in the air. The

poets have also used the birds of the air as symbols of liberty, and the philosophers have assumed that the original savage enjoyed the same liberty as the beasts and the birds. They have judged like the schoolboy. The schoolboy would find little of the liberty he imagines if he could run in the fields but had no one to earn his living for him. In fact, one of the first disillusionments which awaits the civilized schoolboy, when his school-days are over, and he gets liberty, is to find that the necessity of earning a living proves all his visions of freedom to be silly and empty. If he had known more about the bird, he would have known that the bird does not move through the air with much more freedom than a stone. The beast has no freedom because he has no intelligent and conscious choice. In like manner, the savage acts from instinct and unreflectively, and the notion of liberty, as we understand it, does not apply to him. He moves about, it is true, out-of-doors, with a certain degree of unrestraint, but his life is automatic and unreflective; it offers no room for the exercise of choice; it is, in general, absorbed in the desire of getting enough to eat — it is devoted to this business with an intensity and directness which leave no room for liberty of choice.

The mediaeval formula of emancipation consisted in declaring that the emancipated person might go where he chose. This seems to indicate that the mediaeval notion of liberty was freedom of going and coming. It would accord, then, with the sort of freedom envied by the schoolboy, and enjoyed by the savage; but the serf who had been emancipated found that after all he must go where he could earn his living; that his freedom of movement was soon exhausted; and that whatever he had won consisted, not in wandering about, not in becom-

142 EARTH HUNGER AND OTHER ESSAYS

ing a vagabond, but in using his powers to further his own happiness, not that of others.

Shall we infer, then, that liberty — meaning by liberty still unrestrainedness of action — is only possible for the civilized people, who can and do make intelligent choices, at least, between different aims and different codes of conduct?

The civilized man has won immense control over nature in certain senses and in certain ways; what to the savage man was a terror is to him a slave. All this has become commonplace; but what is vastly more important, but not so generally understood, is that we have won a diversity in our ways of meeting nature. If she threatens us or harms us in one way, we can avoid that way and meet her in another, where she serves our purpose. It is this above all which marks the position of the civilized man, as compared with the savage man, in dealing with nature. The latter stood face to face with nature on few and direct lines; he had little or no variety in his mode of life, little diversity in his lines of activity. Hence, if he was blocked on those to which he was accustomed, he suffered direct defeat. Furthermore, all were defeated at the same time, so that the society suffered a general disaster. In a highly organized society, with well-developed arts and sciences, such cannot be the case. On the contrary, what harms one exercise of human energy benefits another; what hurts one group in the society is an advantage to another; what proves a disaster to one region is a blessing to another. Calamities are common enough, but their scope is limited; they are offset by other things; their effect is alleviated by help from the uninjured parts of the society; it is localized and restricted, so that recovery is, for the society as a whole, quick and easy. *

It follows that the civilized man has a measure of liberty under the natural conditions of life. He constantly exaggerates the measure of this liberty and boasts of it too much, for it is really only a little elbow-room which has been won; but his condition is not the constrained necessity of the savage man.

The civilized man has also developed power of intelligent reflection and rational choice. Leaving aside all controversies of the metaphysicians on this point, we may simply observe that the civilized man has the power to choose his ends in a higher degree than the savage possesses any such power, and he has also immeasurably extended the range of his activities, and so the possibilities of his choice. Liberty of disposition of his powers is worth, to the civilized man, incalculably more than to the savage.

It appears, then, so far, that liberty is the endowment of the civilized man, and that he needs only to go on and use it; but further study will show altogether different aspects of the matter.

There is no good on earth that comes gratuitously — there is always a price to be paid. The price of liberty is liberty. The civilized man is born into ties and bonds which either do not exist for the savage man, or are very light for him. The ties of family are arbitrarily strong on some of the middling grades of civilization; in the lowest grades they are generally very loose. Among civilized peoples they form bonds which create duties and obligations constraining liberty. The inheritance of civilization brings burdens and duties to those through whom it comes; it entails duties also to that civilized state, by whose institutions the inheritance is preserved and its descent guaranteed. The civilized man is born into a whole network of restraints which the savage does

144 EARTH HUNGER AND OTHER ESSAYS

not know, or which are evidently the same restraints which we have already noticed in the case of the savage, only in an altered form. I cannot do what I want to do, because I must do what my duty to my parents and my country calls upon me to do — a duty which is not arbitrary or traditional, but rationally deduced from the relations into which I am born.

The liberty of the civilized man also costs discipline and education. Once more, we find that the civilized man has squirmed around into a new position, which makes things wear a little different aspect, but the real case is not essentially altered. The savage youth has his hard discipline to undergo, so that he may endure the hardships of savage life and fulfil the career of a savage man; our schoolboy, eager to escape his duty, is under the same constraint in a new form. The higher the attainments in civilization the heavier and longer this task of taking up and fitting upon ourselves our inheritance.

Another part of the cost of sharing in the products of civilization, including its liberty, is that we must enter into the organization of civilized society, and bear our part in its work of production. Civilization is built on capital; it is all the time using up capital; it cannot be maintained, unless the supply of capital is kept up. It is not a figure of speech to say that it is like the necessity of fuel if we want to keep up the speed of a railroad train, because the railroad train is really a case in point. To get a share in the products, we must do a share of the work, and when we do that our liberty is gone. The bigger the crowd, the more intense the struggle; the higher the organization, the more imperative its coercion on all its members. We cannot get our living unless we get into the organization; when, however, we once

get into it, it is ruin to fall out, but if we stay in, we must submit. We must make contracts binding us to the other members of the organization, and we must keep them. But they fetter our liberty; we must spend our time at the bench, the counter, or the desk, and we cannot get away. Where is there any liberty, in the sense of unrestrained self-will, for the civilized man? The declaimers about the ills of civilization are not astray in their facts; the civilized man is the slave of the industrial organization, of contracts, of the market, of supply and demand — call it what you will, it is, after all, only the weight of existence, and liberty means for us just what it did for the savage; it means that we may maintain existence if we can.

Capital is necessary to civilized existence; so they tell us that we are nowadays the slaves of capital, because we cannot do what we want to do without it. We borrow it; then they say that we are the slaves of debt, or of “hard bargains,” because we have made a contract which it is irksome to fulfil. We are the slaves of the market, because we cannot get a satisfactory price for our goods. We are the slaves of supply and demand, because we cannot get the wages we would like for our services. So we get in a rage and propose revolution, or, at least, state-intervention, because we supposed that we could do as we liked, and now we find that we cannot.

Who Is Free? Is It the Millionaire?

The uncivilized man is not free, because he is bound by the hardships of his condition, by tradition and custom, by superstition, and by ignorance. He can only escape from the limitations thus fastened upon him by education, and organized labor, systematically applied

146 EARTH HUNGER AND OTHER ESSAYS

to overcome the difficulties of his situation. If, however, he undertakes this course, he must submit to the constraint of orderly and persistent exertion; he must till the land, or he must shut himself up in a factory for ten hours a day. These conditions are impossible for him — they are just the things which he cannot do. On the other hand, the civilized man, if he wants the liberty to roam about which the savage possesses, must live as the savage lives, by hunting and fishing, and his demands on life must be reduced to the range of those of the savage. If he chooses this line of policy and effort, however, he finds that he cannot earn a living, even such as the savage man gets, because he has not the necessary knowledge and skill for that mode of life.

Hence it appears that the notion of liberty, as emancipation from irksome constraint, finds no realization at either end of the scale, but that men give up some things to get others; that they sacrifice one liberty to get another; that they change their point of view and their notions, and that liberty consists in a better adjustment of their notions to their situation at a given time. What we commonly boast of as progress consists in measuring the situation at one time by the notions of another. It would be just as impossible for operatives from a New England cotton mill to live on the plains as for Indians to work ten hours a day in a New England cotton mill. Whether the historical movement by which society has moved from the life of the Indians to that of the cotton operatives has been progress or degeneration, depends on whether it is viewed from the standpoint of the Indian or the white man. We must be convinced that liberty to do as one pleases is not a gift or boon of nature; it is not a natural and original situation which we have lost, or which has been taken from us. All that notion van-

ishes into the realm of illusions. All our ferocious demands that our birthright shall be given back to us, and all our savage threats about those who have robbed us, go with it.

It was an easy way to attain the objects of our desire to put them into the list of the "rights of man," or to resolve that "we are and of right ought to be" as we should like to be. That method has had great popularity for the last hundred years and is now extremely popular; but if we have any liberty, it is because our ancestors have won it by toil and blood. It is not a boon, it is a conquest, and if we ever get any more, it will be because we make it or win it. The struggle for it, moreover, must be aimed, not against each other, but against nature. When men quarrel with each other, as every war shows, they fall back under the dominion of nature. It is only when they unite in co-operative effort against nature that they win triumphs over her and ameliorate their condition on earth.

It may be said, then, that liberty is to be found at the summit of civilization, and that those who have the resources of civilization at their command are the only ones who are free. But the resources of civilization are capital; and so it follows that the capitalists are free, or, to avoid ambiguities in the word capitalist, that the rich are free. Popular language, which speaks of the rich as independent, has long carried an affirmation upon this point. In reality the thirst for wealth is a thirst for this independence of the ills of life, and the interdependence of wealth on civilization and civilization on wealth is the reason why the science of wealth is concerned with the prime conditions of human welfare, and why all denunciations of desire to increase or to win wealth are worse than childish.

148 EARTH HUNGER AND OTHER ESSAYS

A native African, of the tribes who own cattle, may increase his herds to a greater and greater number. He has no other conception of wealth — in the absence of commerce wealth admits of no further differentiation for him. He soon comes to a limit beyond which he cannot watch over his property, and then if he hires somebody to take care of it for him, in effect, he shares it with them. Some of the socialists seem to have in mind some limited right of property, under which this would be the ideal and only mode in which property could be held. The native African cannot, of course, use more than so much of the useful things which his herds produce; he and his family can, at best, only eat, drink, and wear so much. After that, if he wants to own more, it is mere vanity and vexation, and at last becomes such a burden that it defeats itself, and that, in trying to escape this burden, he really, if not avowedly, gives the property away to those who take care of it. In the meantime, although his herds have emancipated him from the cares of his mode of life, that is, from hunger and thirst and cold, they are a very precarious property; they offer a very vulnerable point of attack for an enemy; they awaken cupidity; they cost anxiety; and if they are carried off by a stronger enemy, they leave their former possessor in deeper misery and helplessness than if he had never had them.

If any one regards that as a paradisaical state of things or as a rational limit of the form and mode of property which might be wisely allowed, he must, of course, condemn trade and money and civil government, because these have led on to that development of society in which a man can have, hold, and enjoy indefinite wealth. When trade is introduced, it allows the owner of herds to part with the surplus of them for other things which

he is glad to get. Trade, however, is limited until money is provided as a means for carrying it on. It is security of property, established by a firm civil government, which makes it possible to hold property in amount indefinitely beyond what one can watch and defend by one's own vigilance.

Wealth, therefore, in a highly organized civilized society, gives an emancipation from the ills of earthly life which is enormous, when we take as a standard for it the condition of the poor or the uncivilized. It completely banishes the anxiety for food and drink. It has put millions of the human race in such a position that, although they call themselves poor, nevertheless they never in their whole lives know what it is to feel fear lest they may not have food to eat — an anxiety which, on the other hand, is the consuming care of uncivilized life in general, and makes every other thought impossible. Wealth has created for all civilized men, even the poorest of them, an artificial environment of clothing, shelter, artificial heat, pavements, sewers, means of locomotion, education, and intelligence, a vast amount of which is common property, and is taken and assumed without thought, as if it belonged to the order of nature. It all goes into the common stock, justly enough, because it is really in large part a product of the organization in which all bear parts which cannot be analyzed out and paid for by supply and demand.

A man who is rich, therefore, in this society, can draw to himself and his family, elaborate, highly perfected, and efficient defense against the ills of life. The things which shorten life are work and care; he cannot abolish these, but he can reduce their power in a very important measure. It is all enlargement, liberty, intelligent liberty in the highest and best sense, fit for the men who

150 EARTH HUNGER AND OTHER EASSYS

work and achieve, but do not wail or dream. It issues in leisure, the most valuable of goods in this connection, being a means of quiet and undisturbed application of mental force to the planning of new efforts and new achievements.

So much for this view of the matter. We may be ready to say: liberty is a product of civilization, but it is only for the rich. There is, however, another view which remains to be taken in order to find out whether, among us, the popular notion of liberty is realized by the millionaire or the tramp.

Who Is Free? Is it the Tramp?

The two things which kill men are work and worry. The man who has nothing is under the bondage of labor; the man who has property is under the bondage of care. He who owns land and has raised a crop must be anxious, when the harvest-time approaches, lest another shall reap it. He leaves it exposed because he cannot protect it, but he fears to sleep lest he should lose the fruits of his labor. If this care does not exist, it must be because civil order and security exist to such a degree that it is done away with. Civil security, however, lies, as some of our friends are so fond of reminding us, in the voluntary effort of all his neighbors to defend his property for him. He who has lands or goods has given pledges to fortune, and exposed himself to her shafts, at so many points.

It is a childish notion that wealth keeps itself, and throws off its product without effort or care; but one would think to read what we read that it was very widely entertained. To keep wealth is as hard as to get it. Moth and rust conspire to destroy it; the covetousness

of man is in feud against it. The follies and mistakes of individuals and nations are punished by the destruction of it. It is not possible to make increase from it unless it is put to reproductive use; but every application of it to new production involves the risking of it on a judgment of facts which cannot be ascertained with certainty; some of which may be future. In every application of capital to reproduction it must undergo transmutation or transformation. We seek it again in a new product; but before we can get it again we must go through an operation of exchange involving value. Whether, therefore, we shall find our capital again with increase, or not, is a question which can only be answered by the result; and it will at best depend upon chances of the market, which defy foresight.

We have already seen that the man who sells services in the market is under the hazards of the market. The worst troubles of which he complains are the tyranny of supply and demand, and the freaks of the market which interrupt the demand for labor. If he hires anybody to carry this risk for him, he has to pay for that service. That is the explanation of many differences in the comparative rate of wages in different employments.

Now, however, we see that the owner of capital, if he tries to get profit on it, encounters also this same tyranny of the market. If he hires any one to take the risk for him, he must pay for it; if he wants the great gains, he can get them only by putting in the effort and care which are required for the successful conduct of great enterprises. The conditions of this success are as stringent and coercive as those of the labor market, if not more so. The vigilance which conducts industrial enterprises can never relax: if one owns cattle and horses, he must guard them against accidents and disease; if

152 EARTH HUNGER AND OTHER ESSAYS

he owns houses, he must fear fire and storm; if he owns ships, he must expect accidents and shipwreck; if he owns railroads, his chances of profit are precarious for a dozen reasons. I remember once hearing a mechanic who had become rich say something like this: "I used to throw down my tools at six o'clock and think no more of my work until morning. I envied rich men and thought that they had only to live at ease and free from care; but since I have had property I have had more sleepless nights than in all my life before."

I pass over the cares of riches which belong only to the care of objects of luxury like horses and villas and yachts, and also the cares which come from the burdens laid on wealth by other people who know what should be the duties of wealth and are eager to see that wealth performs them. There is another set of constraints and limitations which comes from the fact that the contract relations of wealth are necessarily far more numerous and complicated than those of poverty. The great limitation on the liberty of the civilized man is that which comes from his contracts. Society is bound together by these, and they increase in a high ratio by the side of the increase of wealth; they forbid a man to do as he would like to do, and force him to do what he has agreed to do; he is under bonds to do this from the very fact of his wealth, which makes him responsible. It is one of the injustices of modern society which are never mentioned in our current discussions, but one of the most mischievous from which we suffer, that a man who has no property may break contracts with impunity.

It is no light thing, also, that a man who has property should be responsible for all damages which may proceed forth from himself or his property against any of his fellow-citizens; which liability, although it is as

great in law and morals against a poor man, is, nevertheless, practically null in the latter case. With the tendency of the law to extend the liability of the owners of capital for all the injuries attendant upon the use of capital, even to those injuries which proceed from it only constructively, and to relieve those who have no capital from ordinary human responsibility for themselves, this injustice is increasing. It is one of the results of the reckless dogmatizing which is going on in regard to social obligations, founded, not upon reasonable considerations of the relations which exist, but upon previously adopted partiality for one set of interests. Any assertion that wealth ought to have social or civil privileges sends a shiver of horror through modern society, which asserts that all men are equal; but how can two men be equal, one of whom is pecuniarily responsible for his contracts and his torts and the other is not?

It has been said above that if the man of property escapes the first anxieties about the possession of property, it must be because he lives in an orderly, civilized state, in which his neighbors concur to guarantee his security of possession. Hence, however, comes also the constraint of liberty by the state which protects; he who relies upon state protection must pay for it by limitations of liberty; by every new demand which he makes on the state, he increases its functions and the burden of it on himself. Weary of protecting himself, he begs the state to take care of him; the state, however, only orders him to take care of himself in co-operation with others under its supervision, and it takes toll from him in money, time, and services for giving him this good advice and this wholesome coercion.

From all this it appears, then, that in getting property we do not get liberty, in the sense of absence of

154 EARTH HUNGER AND OTHER ESSAYS

constraint and opportunity to do as we please. We have only changed the form of our constraint. Tired of barbarism and its limitations, we take civilization at its price. The price, however, is a new constraint. It consists in care and worry; in police regulation and all the compromises of civilization; in co-operation to sustain institutions, and in voluntary submission to law. The instruments of the new servitude are the means which served to emancipate us from the old one; the rich man, if he gets more of the emancipation, gets also more of the new servitude. Liberty has not been found yet. We are like men mired in a swamp, who, in pulling out one leg or one arm, only plunge others more deeply in — so long as we follow this chimsera of liberty here on earth to do as we please.

But there is another case which should be considered before we give up our pursuit of the idea as a mere chimsera. May not the tramp be the true free man? He is a civilized man. He lives in a civilized community; he shares in its institutions; he contributes his vote to its political welfare; he takes a philosophical view of wealth, and avoids its cares; he nourishes a profound sentiment of its duties; he has no property to perish, no investments to worry about. The story is told of a tramp who came to a certain valley, which was inundated by a freshet. There was a great demand for help to carry persons and property in boats to a place of safety. The tramp threw down the bundle which contained all he had in the world, and declared: "This is my harvest." He demanded ten dollars a day, and went to work at that rate. This was true philosophy; he kept out of the labor market until the "conjuncture" of supply and demand was all on his side, and then he went in.

The tramp enjoys the true liberty of going and coming, which, in the case of the barbarian, is only apparent and delusive. He is free from the restraints of civilization. Whether he is free from the superstition and traditional servitude of mind which marks the savage, it is difficult to say — it does not belong to the definition of his case that he should be so free. To the extent, then, to which he is free to do as he pleases, he is so because, although born into civilized society and continuing in it, he has abandoned most of the blessings of civilization, and wins the rest only by begging, or taking them without rendering any equivalent. He must upon occasion endure hunger and cold like the savage man; he must endure outlawry, suspicion, and contempt; in some states he finds himself a criminal, in fact, a felon. In such cases he is not merely a drone or a neutral, still less is he a tolerated parasite; he is at war with society. That is to say, a certain small number of men can realize the dreamed-of poetical liberty of the barbarian by seeking it in the midst of civilization, if they will endure contumely to get it, and if they will sacrifice all the other blessings of civilization for it.