

CHAPTER XVIII.

I am always surprised by the oft-repeated words: "Yes, this is so in theory, but how is it in practice?" Just as though theory were fine words, requisite for conversation, but not for the purpose of having all practice, that is, all activity, indispensably founded on them.

There must be a fearful number of stupid theories current in the world, that such an extraordinary idea should have become prevalent. Theory is what a man thinks on a subject, but its practice is what he does. How can a man think it necessary to do so and so, and then do the contrary? If the theory of baking bread is, that it must first be mixed, and then set to rise, no one except a lunatic, knowing this theory, would do the reverse. But it has become the fashion with us to say, that "this is so in theory, but how about the practice?"

In the matter which interests me now, that has been confirmed which I have always thought,--that practice infallibly flows from theory, and not that it justifies it, but it cannot possibly be otherwise, for if I have understood the thing of which I have been thinking, then I cannot carry out this thing otherwise than as I have understood it.

I wanted to help the unfortunate only because I had money, and I shared the general belief that money was the representative of labor, or, on the whole, something legal and good. But, having begun to

give away this money, I saw, when I gave the bills which I had accumulated from poor people, that I was doing precisely that which was done by some landed proprietors who made some of their serfs wait on others. I saw that every use of money, whether for making purchases, or for giving away without an equivalent to another, is handing over a note for extortion from the poor, or its transfer to another man for extortion from the poor. I saw that money in itself was not only not good, but evidently evil, and that it deprives us of our highest good,--labor, and thereby of the enjoyment of our labor, and that that blessing I was not in a position to confer on any one, because I was myself deprived of it: I do not work, and I take no pleasure in making use of the labor of others.

It would appear that there is something peculiar in this abstract argument as to the nature of money. But this argument which I have made not for the sake of argument, but for the solution of the problem of my life, of my sufferings, was for me an answer to my question: What is to be done?

As soon as I grasped the meaning of riches, and of money, it not only became clear and indisputable to me, what I ought to do, but also clear and indisputable what others ought to do, because they would infallibly do it. I had only actually come to understand what I had known for a long time previously, the theory which was given to men from the very earliest times, both by Buddha, and Isaiah, and Lao-Tze, and Socrates, and in a peculiarly clear and indisputable manner

by Jesus Christ and his forerunner, John the Baptist. John the Baptist, in answer to the question of the people,--What were they to do? replied simply, briefly, and clearly: "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise" (Luke iii. 10, 11). In a similar manner, but with even greater clearness, and on many occasions, Christ spoke. He said: "Blessed are the poor, and woe to the rich." He said that it is impossible to serve God and mammon. He forbade his disciples to take not only money, but also two garments. He said to the rich young man, that he could not enter into the kingdom of heaven because he was rich, and that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. He said that he who should not leave every thing, houses and children and lands, and follow him, could not be his disciple. He told the parable of the rich man who did nothing bad, like our own rich men, but who only arrayed himself in costly garments, and ate and drank daintily, and who lost his soul thereby; and of poor Lazarus, who had done nothing good, but who was saved merely because he was poor.

This theory was sufficiently familiar to me, but the false teachings of the world had so obscured it that it had become for me a theory in the sense which people are fond of attributing to that term, that is to say, empty words. But as soon as I had succeeded in destroying in my consciousness the sophisms of worldly teaching, theory conformed to practice, and the truth with regard to my life and to the life of the people about me became its conclusion.

I understood that man, besides life for his own personal good, is unavoidably bound to serve the good of others also; that, if we take an illustration from the animal kingdom,--as some people are fond of doing, defending violence and conflict by the conflict for existence in the animal kingdom,--the illustration must be taken from gregarious animals, like bees; that consequently man, not to mention the love to his neighbor incumbent on him, is called upon, both by reason and by his nature, to serve other people and the common good of humanity. I comprehended that the natural law of man is that according to which only he can fulfil destiny, and therefore be happy. I understood that this law has been and is broken hereby,--that people get rid of labor by force (like the robber bees), make use of the toil of others, directing this toil, not to the common weal, but to the private satisfaction of swift-growing desires; and, precisely as in the case of the robber bees, they perish in consequence. [I understood that the original form of this disinclination for the law is the brutal violence against weaker individuals, against women, wars and imprisonments, whose sequel is slavery, and also the present reign of money. I understood that money is the impersonal and concealed enslavement of the poor. And, once having perceived the significance of money as slavery, I could not but hate it, nor refrain from doing all in my power to free myself from it.] {21}

When I was a slave-owner, and comprehended the immorality of my

position, I tried to escape from it. My escape consisted in this, that I, regarding it as immoral, tried to exercise my rights as slave-owner as little as possible, but to live, and to allow other people to live, as though that right did not exist. And I cannot refrain from doing the same thing now in reference to the present form of slavery,--exercising my right to the labor of others as little as possible, i.e., hiring and purchasing as little as possible.

The root of every slavery is the use of the labor of others; and hence, the compelling others to it is founded indifferently on my right to the slave, or on my possession of money which is indispensable to him. If I really do not approve, and if I regard as an evil, the employment of the labor of others, then I shall use neither my right nor my money for that purpose; I shall not compel others to toil for me, but I shall endeavor to free them from the labor which they have performed for me, as far as possible, either by doing without this labor or by performing it for myself.

And this very simple and unavoidable deduction enters into all the details of my life, effects a total change in it, and at one blow releases me from those moral sufferings which I have undergone at the sight of the sufferings and the vice of the people, and instantly annihilates all three causes of my inability to aid the poor, which I had encountered while seeking the cause of my lack of success.

The first cause was the herding of the people in towns, and the absorption there of the wealth of the country. All that a man needs is to understand how every hiring or purchase is a handle to extortion from the poor, and that therefore he must abstain from them, and must try to fulfil his own requirements; and not a single man will then quit the country, where all wants can be satisfied without money, for the city, where it is necessary to buy every thing: and in the country he will be in a position to help the needy, as has been my own experience and the experience of every one else.

The second cause is the estrangement of the rich from the poor. A man needs but to refrain from buying, from hiring, and, disdaining no sort of work, to satisfy his requirements himself, and the former estrangement will immediately be annihilated, and the man, having rejected luxury and the services of others, will amalgamate with the mass of the working people, and, standing shoulder to shoulder with the working people, he can help them.

The third cause was shame, founded on a consciousness of immorality in my owning that money with which I desired to help people. All that is required is: to understand the significance of money as impersonal slavery, which it has acquired among us, in order to escape for the future from falling into the error according to which money, though evil in itself, can be an instrument of good, and in order to refrain from acquiring money; and to rid one's self of it in

order to be in a position to do good to people, that is, to bestow on them one's labor, and not the labor of another.