

THE HUMAN SCRAP HEAP

The eldest son in an average, typical family, at the age of fifteen, while in the eighth grade of a city school, was told by his parents that living expenses were very high and that he must now contribute his mite toward the family funds. He was tired of school, he was ably willing to work. For three years after leaving school he earned seven dollars a week as an office boy. He was then called "on the carpet" and his employer told him kindly, "John, I don't know what to do about you. You are too big for an office boy and you can't hold down a better job."

John's wanderings then began. He thought he had a permanent job as an elevator man and he married. But after that he had to take a place as a porter, then as teamster, and finally he drifted from shop to factory and back again, always hired to do odd jobs calling for no skill or ambition. At the end of twenty years a social worker found John—his hair was gray but he was still jack of all trades and master of none; already too old to learn, yet too young and too poor to stop work. His wife had turned to scrubbing, his three sons, following in his footsteps, had turned from grade school to offices.

At 45 years of age John was found on a park bench studying want ads. This man who had done all kinds of work but was skilled master of none, was a derelict—he had shifted so often that all sense of stability in him seemed lost. Now his hope was gone and he had given up. His eldest son had helped support the family until at last in despair he had left home, and no word had been received from him since. The youngest son was out of work, and the death of the second son and his burial had emptied the slim family exchequer and brought the father and the mother down to poverty.

"Don't let them send me to the poorhouse at Dunning," pleaded the gray-haired mother, aged prematurely by toil and sorrow. "There's nothing the matter with me, except I can't work hard any more, and there's nothing to do at Dunning but to sit and watch the days go by."

Yet before the year was out "over the hills to the poorhouse," a part of the longest and saddest procession the business world of any age has ever known, she was forced to wend her way.

In Chicago a refined, cultured old lady of 60 had often hired the wife of wandering John to scrub. This lady herself had a husband who, after spending a comfortable competency in a vain effort to restore the eyesight of their son, had died suddenly, leaving his wife essentially nothing but her home. She saw that she had to earn a living for herself and "her boy." She sold their home and bought a fruit farm in Michigan. Together mother and son toiled early and late; but the son could not accomplish much, and right and left the credulous pair were defrauded of the proceeds of their labor, until at last they were obliged to sell their farm at a sacrifice and to return to Chicago with their little store of money to open a boarding house. There was work here for the blind son, for he could attend to the furnace and help in other ways. But the old lady, already showing the effects of her worry and toil, found that her roomers could not pay enough for her to make both ends meet.

She kept on struggling, seeing her funds grow less and less, yet too proud to ask for help. Certain friends, however, at last induced a charity organization to investigate her case. That organization endeavored to gain assistance for her from a church to which the old lady in her prosperity had given a large sum only a few years before, but nothing came of their efforts. At last this woman, who had all her life been sheltered from want and misery, reached the point where she was forced to turn to scrubbing in office buildings for a living—work that would soon end her life. Rather than see this, the charity organization decided to pay her a weekly pension, barely sufficient to furnish her with the necessities of life, but she was thus saved from the poorhouse.

To the University of Chicago Settlement recently there came a woman of another and more ordinary type. She was large and able physically and no difficulty was found in securing for her an opportunity to work. But strange to say, she lost one place after another, always according to her own voluble excuses, because she insisted on taking with her, to each new place of employment, a huge feather bed. At last the Headworker of the Settlement felt sure this able woman was permanently located in a family where she helped about the house and took care of two children whom she seemed to love, yet on inquiry it was

learned that she was not satisfactory even here, because of the bitterness of her tongue. Soon after her employer telephoned to the Settlement from his office that he and his wife could not "put up with her any longer." One of the Settlement workers called on the big German woman and tactfully intimated that she must not gossip. "So they say I'm gossip," concluded the housemaid and nurse. "Well, I'm on my way then." And she stopped work then and there. For the Settlement workers there was little encouragement to try to find another place for this able-bodied but irascible woman. It seemed inevitable from what had gone before that her tongue would drive her from any position. She goes about alone seeking odd jobs now, earning enough perhaps to provide for her immediate needs, but alas, laying by nothing to provide for her future and failing years.

To see an aged woman suffer is sad; to see her trudging on her way to the industrial scrap heap is still sadder still; nor is it much less pitiable to see a worn-out father toiling "over the hills to the poorhouse." There are more men than women in that mournful procession, for the reason that, in leading a full life, a woman learns to do many things and to do them well, but a man usually learns to do but one thing, and when he loses his place at the narrow task that has absorbed his life, he has no recourse. The office worker is one of the most common and pathetic sufferers in this cruel elimination of those who are approaching the age of limitations.

A clean old churchgoer, an experienced bookkeeper approaching fifty years of age, with wife, son and daughter, suffered a typical experience—one that is repeated in "infinite variations" in thousands of offices. For twenty-eight years he kept the same set of books for the same small firm. He felt he was as much a permanent part of that office as the big ledger itself. During the 28th summer he suffered from indigestion and took a month off to recuperate. When he returned, a young man was keeping the books in his little cage. The proprietor told the old man that the young man would have to stay because his methods were up to date. The old man thereafter was not able to procure even the opportunity to hold another position. By the very nature of his experience year after year in one small office he had been incapacitated for the rest of his life.

A few months ago a coffee salesman who had worked twenty years for one Boston house, who had lived well, but saved nothing, was suddenly, out of a clear sky, notified that his services were no longer required. There was no complaint as to his work or as to the manner in which he performed it. He was told frankly, "You are too old, that's all." He was confident he could get other work at once, but he is still fighting persistently but fruitlessly for another position.

These examples are but illustrative. To enumerate the long list of industries from which old employees are flung like junk to the waste heap, would be but to run over the list of all industries except a chosen few of the largest corporations that pension their employees or provide old age insurance for them.

"We've given up trying out mid-dle-aged stenographers and bookkeepers," explained one large employer. "They have little mannerisms, cranky little ways of doing things, that will not go in the business world. We've given up trying to teach them our way. We haven't the time, and so often they're not willing to learn. We can't give them a chance because they won't fit themselves into the modern scheme of things."

Then there are the bank employees. All over the country the tendency among banks is toward consolidation. In Boston, to illustrate, the Shawmut National Bank consolidated more than twenty small banks, and the gray-haired bookkeepers in every one of those smaller banks were displaced by men who were young, alert, adaptable, familiar with the adding machine and all other mechanical office devices, and willing to work for small salaries.

Also, to select at random from the list of industries, there are the clothing establishment, the cigar shop, the department store—all conforming to this policy of refusing to give even the middle-aged a chance. For this is an age of swift and sudden changes. The world has known no era in which there have been more rapid and more astounding changes along social, industrial and economic lines. Unfortunately, to the man of middle or old age the old way is the right way—the one way. Instead of being adaptable he is static, and he grows more and more so as he approaches the age of limitations.

"Industry will not absorb what it

has no use for, whether things or human beings," declared Geo. Warren, a young Harvard man who has charge of the "handicaps" that apply to the Boston Associated Charities for aid to keep them from "going over the hill to the poorhouse."

"And what makes the whole problem more sad," added Miss Elizabeth Holbrook, assistant secretary of the same organization, after she had discussed the danger of man or woman turning prisonward when all family bonds are removed, "what makes the problem more sad is the fact that when a father or mother is unable to work and becomes melancholy or disagreeable in consequence, if the family needs the earnings of the parents they are apt to be considered undesirable members of the family."

Thus the problem of the disposal of the aged unfit is a vital one that goes straight to the rockbed of family and industrial life. And with every passing year it grows more momentous and more insistent because the great mass of women office workers in the cities, latter-day industrial units as they are, are but now approaching the age of limitations and facing old age with its evils of querulousness, irascibility, and all the swarm of other disabilities that come with years.

Some investigators have suggested the small town as the place best suited to absorb the gray of hair. In the country town there is work that they can do—comparatively light work—housekeeping and garden work, for instance, especially if they are willing "to soften their price to their strength." Investigators find comparatively few cases where men or women, able and willing to work in the small towns, go begging for work to do. And then, too, they realize that the cost of living in the small town is greatly less than in the large city. The remedy is good as far as it goes. Yet the small town, everyone admits, can absorb few more of the halt, aged and weak than those which develop within its own confines.

But in the city every day one is appalled by the awful hopelessness of the aged who have been cut off from lifelong employment or been thrown upon the world by death or some other family calamity. Every day the procession over the hills to the industrial scrap heap grows longer and longer until its very increase seems to presage a day when employer, state and employee must combine to provide for the future of the worker. Massachusetts, first always in insurance, followed now by six other states, has established, upon plans furnished and fostered by the Lawyer of the People, Louis D. Brandeis, an adequate system of state savings bank insurance against old age, loss of employment, and incapacitation. In Germany, by act of legislation, day by day or month by month the thrifty worker deposits his savings in one of the state savings banks. From these banks month by month premiums are transferred to the state insurance department where, at rates astoundingly low, insurance is obtained against improvidence and failure to provide for lack of employment, sickness, and old age. No better remedy than this system of state insurance has yet been proposed.—Technical Magazine.

NOTICE

In the Matter of an Application for the issue of a duplicate Certificate of Title to the West ½ of the East ½ of Lot 5, Block 5, Town of West Fernie, Map 735.

Notice Is Hereby Given that it is my intention to issue at the expiration of one month after the first publication hereof a duplicate Certificate of Title to the above mentioned lot in the name of John Charnock, which Certificate is dated the 11th day of July, 1912, and numbered 16431A.

S. R. Roe,
District Registrar
Nelson, B.C., January 6, 1914.
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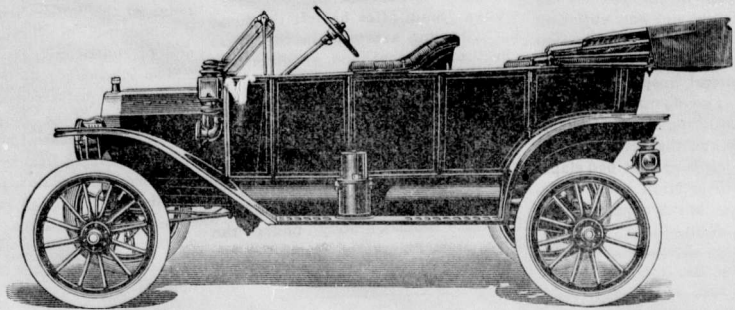
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