

Opportunity

"MEN," runs the argument, "do not make use of their capacities, do not try to discover or make opportunities, lack initiative to forge ahead, to rise out of the rut, out from the commonality, and become leaders of men." The high-minded ones put forth such argument as it were undisputed truth. In reality it is merely the visionlessness of egotism. Being superficial, it appeals to a cult which dares not venture beyond the superficial. Except that it contains the appearance of fact,—and thereby confuses the unwary—it is not worth confuting. Yet because its vanities might be dispelled before social realities can find lodgment in our minds, we must take the measure of its inanities.

What is an opportunity? And how take advantage of it? An opportunity is the occasion of transient circumstances, permitting of particular advantage. In the sense in which it is used here, it means personal advantage to be derived from the immediate circumstance of our condition. Opportunity, therefore, involves the question of condition. Does our condition, then, offer us the advantage of opportunity?

Our status in society being that of slaves, our conditions of life are entirely dependent on that status. We are born into social conditions which are determined by the particular stage of progress, and hedged about by all the multitudinous conventions of political subjection. We inherit society. We are made by society. We imbibe its viewpoint and govern ourselves by its standards. And although individual peculiarities and tendencies play their part in the totality of social forces, still, in the general aspect of social activities we can no more escape the trammellings of its custom and use than we can live without air. We are slaves by birth. We are not sold into slavery, or reduced to it. It is our political destiny, our share in the present progress of social development. We are slaves by quite natural processes, but not by natural intent. We are slaves by political contrivances, time induced by time condition. We are slaves because a certain section of society own and control the means whereby we live, and from which we are totally debarred—except that the owners thereof can derive advantage from their operation.

The economic laws of individual (or class) ownership curtail the progressive degradation of dispossessed society. Certainly, private ownership has widened the standards of society. But it has also confined them in the arbitrary channels of class. It has heightened the potential of life, and at the same time lowered the actuality of existence. If its rewards are great, they are possible only to the few. If its achievements are commanding, their price is a ruined civilization. And if its ambitions are imposing and imperial, they reflect like the blazing autumn, the spent energies of growth.

These things are not mere declamation. They are the demonstrable facts of daily experience; the common phenomena of our moribund existence. We ask freedom,—and are content with geographical extension. We seek for the bread of equality in life, and are mocked with the stone of equality in law. And because we do not see the distinction, we walk softly before the iron gods of trade, live hardly, and die like a "cadgers powny." Life long we go in company with the spectres of poverty, paralyzed with vagrant toil and monotonous denial; in all that we do, haunted by insecurity. As soon as it is humanly possible our children are set to work. The meagre wages of competitive labor make it necessary; cheap production, imperative. That is why child labor is so common,—so common it does not even raise a ripple on the foetid deeps of our ethic. They do not even go as the native bent of temperament entices. They are driven into the "opportunity" of whatever vocation offers to eke out support for the sacred homes of capital. In company

with their generation they repeat the frothing life struggle of their parents—modified by the gathering bitterness and moral obliquities consequent on the ever increasing potential of abundance, on the one hand, and the piling accumulations of wasted forces on the other. And even at that they stay with the job or become "Jacks," as the machine market determines. The years pass; youth grows into maturity, with all its natural desires and enthusiasms. Maturity sees those desires frustrated and distorted, those enthusiasms blighted and barren in the mirage of capitalist opportunity. Natural vigor declines, and with it the vim of the ideal. Youth and competition force aside the exhausted relics of service, and profit can offer them no place. And after years of enforced thrift, and sabre toothed frugality, they find themselves—the grown children of the poor—broken and prospectless, and in the eyes of bourgeois society, failures. Then along comes the antique idealist with his brief of incentive, and lost opportunity, and unambitious grubbing, mocking at the life that is the mockery of capital. Where was the lost opportunity? What ruined initiative? What killed incentive? What limited ambition to the sordid thralldom of a job? Capitalist ownership of the social means of life. Capitalist direction of production for profit. Capitalist regulation of the inexhaustible treasures of human creative energy. That is what suffocates society and temporarily, by the class device of political subjection, harnesses the illimitable indomitability of man to the yoke of the purger price system.

Tell me, "ye venerable core," has a docker an opportunity to become a shipowner? Will thrift make over a company director? Will ambition elevate a logger to the ownership of a lumber mill? Will it make a miner a coal baron? Will a pipe tender "rise" to the false dignity of Broadway? Has a plain ordinary engineer an opportunity to be general manager of a railroad? Can the teeming hosts of hopeful machine tenders be other than the determinants of their social conditions? What can craftsmanship achieve against the monopoly of big business? Of what avail incentive against the professionalism of high finance? What is the meaning of government and law? Who nominated politicians and presidents? Why? Who became directors and managers? And why? Who gather dividends, and why? Who deal in stocks? Who does the work of the world? Who gathers the fatness of labor, and the magnificence thereof? The opportunist who answers those questions unequivocally will, at the same time, dispose of his "opportunity."

Opportunity in any real sense does not exist. It holds no communion with clock punchers. Here and there, out of the harried millions, a few may painfully struggle to a pitiful competence, but the crumbs that fall from the laden tables of possession is all that bondage can ever acquire of its own. Always there is wealth at the roots of the rainbow; but the trail is white with the bleaching bones of disillusioned adventurers. Always there are the sparkling vistas of tomorrow; but, to slaves, tomorrow dies with the dawn.

Opportunity is the prerogative of the free; of society free of its means of life; free in the conscious security of their unstinted bounty. In that freedom only lies all opportunity, and the unimagined wealth of social enterprise. Not the mere wealth of things only, but carrying in its hands the deeper wealth of social unity. In that freedom, the bourgeois application of the "golden rule": "Do to others as others would do to you—but do it first," shall be meaningless as now is the patriotic chatter of servility. And in that freedom—the social ownership of the social means of life—success will be no longer the ethic of god and his profit, but the unhampered initiative of craftsmanship, eager in the joy of its freedom.

"To discover opportunity," "to forge ahead,"

to "become a leader of men"—that is the tawdry gospel of "success," the shopworn ethic of merchandising. To advocate success is to advocate slavery. "To forge ahead," is to betray the fundamental principles of human unity. "To rise out of the rut" is to rise on the bowed shoulders of servitude. To "discover" opportunity is to appropriate the fruits of social labor. And to "become a leader of men" is to become a leader of a race degraded with the servility of subjection, and debased with the sterility of possession. Leadership, to be real, must envisage the splendor of a people that has lifted itself out of captivity. And when it does that, it will be no longer the sordid mastery of necessitous men, based on possession, but the proud prestige of a social genius, based on knowledge, that, being free to all, and kindred to all, endows all with the soaring wings of creation. R.

OIL AND BRITISH-AMERICAN RIVALRY

America insisted upon an "open door" policy in Mesopotamia, and sent an observer to Lausanne, while Mr. Untermeyer urged "the claims of twenty two Turkish Princes and Princesses to the oil fields."

France sent Mr. Franklin Bouillon to make a pact with Kemal, who then wiped up the Greeks, so that this army was free to reconquer Mesopotamia. Britain rushed out troops and gun boats, and asked France and Italy to strengthen their troops in Turkey, but they both replied by withdrawing them. This left Britain with a somewhat precarious hold on the oilfields, especially as Feisul wanted them to clear out of Irak. Now the Angora Government has ratified the Chester concession.

The S.O.C. has also obtained its pre-war concession in Palestine. Persia had been divided before the war into a Russian zone of influence in the North known to contain minerals, a British zone in the south containing oil, and a strip in the centre for the natives. Oil was discovered in the Russian zone, and a Russo-Persian Oil Co. was floated in 1917.

After the Russian Revolution, the Bolsheviks withdrew the Russian troops from Persia, and restored North Persia to the Persians. Then the British troops were pushed through into North Persia, and in 1920, "North Persia Oils Ltd." (Capital £3,000,000 was floated, with Sir Charles Greenway of the A.P.O.C. as chairman; the Persian army was supplied with British officers, and the Persian Government with a British financial advisor.

A vigorous anti-British propaganda emanated from the American legation at Teheran, which Curzon told Colby to stop; but it proved so successful that the concessions which the Persian Government (Nord Persian Oils Ltd.) obtained by coercion, was offered to the S. O. C., and the British financial advisor has been replaced by an American financial advisor, Mr. Millsbaugh, himself an oil man.

Italy was promised the oily part of Albania, and the S.O.C. obtained a concession for the oilfields; but now at the instigation of the Fascist Government, which desires to emancipate Italy from the domination of foreign oil groups, the Italian Syndicate of Fascist Co-operatives has formed a company to deal in liquid fuel.

South America promises to become a great oil producing country, but the "British Controlled Oilfields Ltd." found they had not the resources to exploit their huge concessions, so despite the boast that here was a "real British company, not a barrel of whose oil should be subjected to alien control," today both the R.D.S. and the S.O.C. are working on its concessions.

What will be the end of this oil struggle in which thousands of natives have been slaughtered in Russia, Turkey, Persia, Syria, Mexico, and elsewhere, and which was one of the chief causes of the last war? Sir John Cadman of the A.P.O.C. sug-