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THE INSTINCT OF WORKMANSHIP AND THE IRKSOMENESS OF LABOR.

IT is one of the commonplaces of the received economic theory that work is irksome. Many a discussion proceeds on this axiom that, so far as regards economic matters, men desire above all things to get the goods produced by labor and to avoid the labor by which the goods are produced. In a general way the common-sense opinion is well in accord with current theory on this head. According to the common-sense ideal, the economic beatitude lies in an unrestrained consumption of goods, without work; whereas the perfect economic affliction is unremunerated labor. Man instinctively revolts at effort that goes to supply the means of life.

No one will accept the proposition when stated in this bald fashion, but even as it stands it is scarcely an overstatement of what is implied in the writings of eminent economists. If such an aversion to useful effort is an integral part of human nature, then the trail of the Edenic serpent should be plain to all men, for this is a unique distinction of the human species. A consistent aversion to whatever activity goes to maintain the life of the species is assuredly found in no other species of animal. Under the selective process through which species are held to have emerged and gained their stability there is no chance for the survival of a species gifted with such an aversion to the furtherance of its own life process. If man alone is an exception from the selective norm, then the alien propensity in question must have been intruded into his make-up by some malevolent *deus ex machina.*

Yet, for all the apparent absurdity of the thing, there is the fact. With more or less sincerity, people currently avow an aversion to useful effort. The avowal does not cover all effort, but only such as is of some use; it is, more particularly, such effort as is vulgarly recognized to be useful labor. Less

repugnance is expressed as regards effort which brings gain without giving a product that is of human use, as, for example, the effort that goes into war, politics, or other employments of a similar nature. And there is commonly no avowed aversion to sports or other similar employments that yield neither a pecuniary gain nor a useful product. Still, the fact that a given line of effort is useless does not of itself save it from being odious, as is shown by the case of menial service; much of this work serves no useful end, but it is none the less repugnant to all people of sensibility.

"The economic man," whose lineaments were traced in outline by the classical economists and filled in by their caricaturists, is an anomaly in the animal word; and yet, to judge by everyday popular expressions of inclination, the portrait is not seriously overdrawn. But if this economic man is to serve as a lay figure upon which to fit the garment of economic doctrines, it is incumbent upon the science to explain what are his limitations and how he has achieved his emancipation from the law of natural selection. His emancipation from the law is, indeed, more apparent than substantial. The difference in this respect between man and his sometime competitors in the struggle for survival lies not in a slighter but in a fuller adjustment of his propensities to the purposes of the life of the species. He distanced them all in this respect long ago, and by so wide an interval that he is now able, without jeopardy to the life of the species, to play fast and loose with the spiritual basis of its survival

Like other animals, man is an agent that acts in response to stimuli afforded by the environment in which he lives. Like other species, he is a creature of habit and propensity. But in a higher degree than other species, man mentally digests the content of the habits under whose guidance he acts, and appreciates the trend of these habits and propensities. He is in an eminent sense an intelligent agent. By selective necessity he is endowed with a proclivity for purposeful action. He is possessed of a discriminating sense of purpose, by force of which

all futility of life or of action is distasteful to him. There may be a wide divergence between individuals as regards the form and the direction in which this impulse expresses itself, but the impulse itself is not a matter of idiosyncrasy, it is a generic feature of human nature. It is not a trait that occurs sporadically in a few individuals. Cases occur in which this proclivity for purposeful action is wanting or is present in obviously scant measure, but persons endowed in this stepmotherly fashion are classed as "defective subjects." Lines of descent which carry this defective human nature dwindle and decay even under the propitious circumstances of modern life. The history of hereditarily dependent or defective families is evidence to this effect.

Man's great advantage over other species in the struggle for survival has been his superior facility in turning the forces of the environment to account. It is to his proclivity for turning the material means of life to account that he owes his position as lord of creation. It is not a proclivity to effort, but to achievement — to the compassing of an end. His primacy is in the last resort an industrial or economic primacy. In his economic life man is an agent, not an absorbent; he is an agent seeking in every act the accomplishment of some concrete, objective, impersonal end. As this pervading norm of action guides the life of men in all the use they make of material things, so it must also serve as the point of departure and afford the guiding principle for any science that aims to be a theory of the economic life process. Within the purview of economic theory, the last analysis of any given phenomenon must run back to this ubiquitous human impulse to do the next thing.

All this seems to contradict what has just been said of the conventional aversion to labor. But the contradiction is not so sheer in fact as it appears to be at first sight. Its solution lies in the fact that the aversion to labor is in great part a conventional aversion only. In the intervals of sober reflection, when not harassed with the strain of overwork, men's common sense speaks unequivocally under the guidance of the instinct of workmanship. They like to see others spend their life to some purpose, and they like to reflect that their own life is of some use. All men

have this quasi-æsthetic sense of economic or industrial merit, and to this sense of economic merit futility and inefficiency are distasteful. In its positive expression it is an impulse or instinct of workmanship; negatively it expresses itself in a deprecation of waste. This sense of merit and demerit with respect to the material furtherance or hindrance of life approves the economically effective act and deprecates economic futility. It is needless to point out in detail the close relation between this norm of economic merit and the ethical norm of conduct, on the one hand, and the æsthetic norm of taste, on the other. It is very closely related to both of these, both as regards its biological ground and as regards the scope and method of its award.

This instinct of workmanship apparently stands in sheer conflict with the conventional antipathy to useful effort. The two are found together in full discord in the common run of men; but whenever a deliberate judgment is passed on conduct or on events, the former asserts its primacy in a pervasive way which suggests that it is altogether the more generic, more abiding trait of human nature. There can scarcely be a serious question of precedence between the two. The former is a human trait necessary to the survival of the species; the latter is a habit of thought possible only in a species which has distanced all competitors, and then it prevails only by sufferance and within limits set by the former. The question between them is, Is the aversion to labor a derivative of the instinct of workmanship? and, How has it arisen and gained consistency in spite of its being at variance with that instinct?

Until recently there has been something of a consensus among those who have written on early culture, to the effect that man, as he first emerged upon the properly human plane, was of a contentious disposition, inclined to isolate his own interest and purposes from those of his fellows, and with a penchant for feuds and brawls. Accordingly, even where the view is met with that men are by native proclivity inclined to action, there is still evident a presumption that this native proclivity to action is a proclivity to action of a destructive kind. It is held that men are inclined to fight, not to work—that the end of

action in the normal case is damage rather than repair. This view would make the proclivity to purposeful action an impulse to sportsmanship rather than to workmanship. In any attempt to fit this view into an evolutionary scheme of culture it would carry the implication that in the prehuman or proto-anthropoid phase of its life the race was a predaceous species, and that the initial phase of human culture, as well as the later cultural development, has been substantially of a predatory kind.

There is much to be said for this view. If mankind is by derivation a race not of workmen but of sportsmen, then there is no need of explaining the conventional aversion to work. Work is unsportsmanlike and therefore distasteful, and perplexity then arises in explaining how men have in any degree become reconciled to any but a predaceous life. Apart from the immediate convenience of this view, it is also enforced by much evidence. Most peoples at a lower stage of culture than our own are of a more predatory habit than our people. The history of mankind, as conventionally written, has been a narrative of predatory exploits, and this history is not commonly felt to be one-sided or misinformed. And a sportsmanlike inclination to warfare is also to be found in nearly all modern communities. Similarly, the sense of honor, so-called, whether it is individual or national honor, is also an expression of sportsmanship. The prevalence of notions of honor may, therefore, be taken as evidence going in the same direction. And as if to further fortify the claim of sportsmanship to antiquity and prescriptive standing, the sense of honor is also noticeably more vivid in communities of a somewhat more archaic culture than our own.

Yet there is a considerable body of evidence, both from cultural history and from the present-day phenomena of human life, which traverses this conventionally accepted view that makes man generically a sportsman. Obscurely but persistently, throughout the history of human culture, the great body of the people have almost everywhere, in their everyday life, been at work to turn things to human use. The proximate aim of all industrial improvement has been the better performance of some workmanlike task. Necessarily this work has, on the one hand,

proceeded on the basis of an appreciative interest in the work to be done; for there is no other ground on which to obtain anything better than the aimless performance of a task. And necessarily also, on the other hand, the discipline of work has acted to develop a workmanlike attitude. It will not do to say that the work accomplished is entirely due to compulsion under a predatory régime, for the most striking advances in this respect have been wrought where the coercive force of a sportsmanlike exploitation has been least.

The same view is borne out by the expressions of common sense. As has already been remarked, whenever they dispassionately take thought and pass a judgment on the value of human conduct, the common run of mature men approve workmanship rather than sportsmanship. At the best, they take an apologetic attitude toward the latter. This is well seen in the present (May, 1898) disturbance of the popular temper. While it may well be granted that the warlike raid upon which this community is entering is substantially an access of sportsmanlike exaltation, it is to be noticed that nearly all those who speak for war are at pains to find some colorable motive of another kind. Predatory exploit, simply as such, is not felt to carry its own legitimation, as it should in the apprehension of any species that is primarily of a predaceous character. What meets unreserved approval is such conduct as furthers human life on the whole, rather than such as furthers the invidious or predatory interest of one as against another.

The most ancient and most consistent habits of the race will best assert themselves when men are not speaking under the stress of instant irritation. Under such circumstances the ancient bent may even bear down the immediate conventional canons of conduct. The archaic turn of mind that inclines men to commend workmanlike serviceability is the outcome of long and consistent habituation to a course of life of such a character as is reflected by this inclination.

Man's life is activity; and as he acts, so he thinks and feels. This is necessarily so, since it is the agent man that does the

thinking and feeling. Like other species, man is a creature of habits and propensities. He acts under the guidance of propensities which have been imposed upon him by the process of selection to which he owes his differentiation from other species. He is a social animal; and the selective process whereby he has acquired the spiritual make-up of a social animal has at the same time made him substantially a peaceful animal. The race may have wandered far from the ancient position of peacefulness, but even now the traces of a peaceful trend in men's everyday habits of thought and feeling are plain enough. The sight of blood and the presence of death, even of the blood or death of the lower animals, commonly strike inexperienced persons with a sickening revulsion. In the common run of cases, the habit of complacency with slaughter comes only as the result of discipline. In this respect man differs from the beasts of prey. He differs, of course, most widely in this respect from the solitary beasts, but even among the gregarious animals his nearest spiritual relatives are not found among the carnivora. In his unarmed frame and in the slight degree to which his muscular force is specialized for fighting, as well as in his instinctive aversion to hostile contact with the ferocious beasts, man is to be classed with those animals that owe their survival to an aptitude for avoiding direct conflict with their competitors, rather than with those which survive by virtue of overcoming and eating their rivals.

"Man is the weakest and most defenseless of all living things," and, according to the Law of the Jungle, it is his part to take advice and contrive and turn divers things to account in ways that are incomprehensible to the rest. Without tools he is not a dangerous animal, as animals go. And he did not become a formidable animal until he had made some considerable advance in the contrivance of implements for combat. In the days before tools had been brought into effective use — that is to say, during by far the greater part of the period of human evolution — man could not be primarily an agent of destruction or a disturber of the peace. He was of a peaceable and retiring disposition by force of circumstances. With the use of tools the possibility of

his acquiring a different disposition gradually began, but even then the circumstances favoring the growth of a contentious disposition supervened only gradually and partially. The habits of life of the race were still perforce of a peaceful and industrial character, rather than contentious and destructive. Tools and implements, in the early days, must have served chiefly to shape facts and objects for human use, rather than for inflicting damage and discomfort. Industry would have to develop far before it became possible for one group of men to live at the cost of another; and during the protracted evolution of industry before this point had been reached the discipline of associated life still consistently ran in the direction of industrial efficiency, both as regards men's physical and mental traits and as regards their spiritual attitude.

By selection and by training, the life of man, before a predaceous life became possible, would act to develop and to conserve in him instinct for workmanship. The adaptation to the environment which the situation enforced was of an industrial kind; it required men to acquire facility in shaping things and situations for human use. This does not mean the shaping of things by the individual to his own individual use simply; for archaic man was necessarily a member of a group, and during this early stage, when industrial efficiency was still inconsiderable, no group could have survived except on the basis of a sense of solidarity strong enough to throw self-interest into the background. Self-interest, as an accepted guide of action, is possible only as the concomitant of a predatory life, and a predatory life is possible only after the use of tools has developed so far as to leave a large surplus of product over what is required for the sustenance of the producers. Subsistence by predation implies something substantial to prey upon.

Early man was a member of a group which depended for its survival on the industrial efficiency of its members and on their singleness of purpose in making use of the material means at hand. Some competition between groups for the possession of the fruits of the earth and for advantageous locations there would be even at a relatively early stage, but much hostile con-

tact between groups there could not be; not enough to shape the dominant habits of thought.

What men can do easily is what they do habitually, and this decides what they can think and know easily. They feel at home in the range of ideas which is familiar through their everyday line of action. A habitual line of action constitutes a habitual line of thought, and gives the point of view from which facts and events are apprehended and reduced to a body of knowledge. What is consistent with the habitual course of action is consistent with the habitual line of thought, and gives the definitive ground of knowledge as well as the conventional standard of complacency or approval in any community. Conversely, a process or method of life, once understood, assimilated in thought works into the scheme of life and becomes a norm of conduct, simply because the thinking, knowing agent is also the acting agent. What is apprehended with facility and is consistent with the process of life and knowledge is thereby apprehended as right and good. All this applies with added force where the habituation is not simply individual and sporadic, but is enforced upon the group or the race by a selective elimination of those individuals and lines of descent that do not conform to the required canon of knowledge and conduct. Where this takes place, the acquired proclivity passes from the status of habit to that of aptitude or propensity. It becomes a transmissible trait, and action under its guidance becomes right and good, and the longer and more consistent the selective adaptation through which the aptitude arises, the more firmly is the resulting aptitude settled upon the race, and the more unquestioned becomes the sanction of the resulting canon of conduct.

So far as regards his relation to the material means of life, the canon of thought and of conduct which was in this way enforced upon early man was what is here called the instinct of workmanship. The interest which men took in economic facts on the basis of this propensity, in the days before spoliation came into vogue, was not primarily of a self-regarding character. The necessary dominance of a sense of group solidarity would

preclude that. The selective process must eliminate lines of descent unduly gifted with a self-regarding bias. Still, there was some emulation between individuals, even in the most indigent and most peaceable groups. From the readiness with which a scheme of emulation is entered upon where late circumstances favor its development, it seems probable that the proclivity to emulation must have been present also in the earlier days in sufficient force to assert itself to the extent to which the exigencies of the earlier life of the group would permit. But this emulation could not run in the direction of an individual acquisition or accumulation of goods, or of a life consistently given to raids and tumults. It would be emulation such as is found among the peaceable gregarious animals generally; that is to say, it was primarily and chiefly sexual emulation, recurring with more or less regularity. Beyond this there must also have been some wrangling in the distribution of goods on hand, but neither this nor the rivalry for subsistence could have been the dominant note of life.

Under the canon of conduct imposed by the instinct of workmanship, efficiency, serviceability, commends itself, and inefficiency or futility is odious. Man contemplates his own conduct and that of his neighbors, and passes a judgment of complacency or of dispraise. The degree of effectiveness with which he lives up to the accepted standard of efficiency in great measure determines his contentment with himself and his situation. A wide or persistent discrepancy in this respect is a source of abounding spiritual discomfort.

Judgment may in this way be passed on the intention of the agent or on the serviceability of the act. In the former case the award of merit or demerit is to be classed as moral; and with award of merit of this kind this paper is not concerned. As regards serviceability or efficiency, men do not only take thought at first hand of the facts of their own conduct; they are also sensitive to rebuke or approval from others. Not only is the immediate consciousness of the achievement of a purpose gratifying and stimulating, but the imputation of

efficiency by one's fellows is perhaps no less gratifying or stimulating.

Sensitiveness to rebuke or approval is a matter of selective necessity under the circumstances of associated life. Without it no group of men could carry on a collective life in a material environment that requires shaping to the ends of man. In this respect, again, man shows a spiritual relationship with the gregarious animals rather than with the solitary beasts of prey.

Under the guidance of this taste for good work, men are compared with one another and with the accepted ideals of efficiency, and are rated and graded by the common sense of their fellows according to a conventional scheme of merit and demerit. The imputation of efficiency necessarily proceeds on evidence of efficiency. The visible achievement of one man is, therefore, compared with that of another, and the award of esteem comes habitually to rest on an invidious comparison of persons instead of on the immediate bearing of the given line of conduct upon the approved end of action. The ground of esteem in this way shifts from a direct appreciation of the expediency of conduct to a comparison of the abilities of different agents. Instead of a valuation of serviceability, there is a gauging of capability on the ground of visible success. And what comes to be compared in an invidious comparison of this kind between agents is the force which the agent is able to put forth, rather than the serviceability of the agent's conduct. So soon, therefore, and in so far, as the esteem awarded to serviceability passes into an invidious esteem of one agent as compared with another, the end sought in action will tend to change from naïve expediency to the manifestation of capacity or force. It becomes the proximate end of effort to put forth evidence of power, rather than to achieve an impersonal end for its own sake, simply as an item of human use. So that, while in its more immediate expression the norm of economic taste stands out as an impulse to workmanship or a taste for serviceability and a distaste for futility, under given circumstances of associated life it comes in some degree to take on the character of an emulative demonstration of force.

Since the imputation of efficiency and of invidious merit goes on the evidence afforded by visible success, the appearance of evil must be avoided in order to escape dispraise. In the early savage culture, while the group is small and while the conditions favorable to a predatory life are still wanting, the resulting emulation between the members of the group runs chiefly to industrial efficiency. It comes to be the appearance of industrial incapacity that is to be avoided. It is in this direction that force or capacity can be put in evidence most consistently and with the best effect for the good name of the individual. It is, therefore, in this direction that a standard of merit and a canon of meritorious conduct will develop. But even for a growth of emulation in the productive use of brain and muscle, the small, rude, peaceable group of savages is not fertile ground. The situation does not favor a vigorous emulative spirit. The conditions favorable to the growth of a habit of emulative demonstration of force are (1) the frequent recurrence of conjunctures that call for a great and sudden strain, and (2) exposure of the individual to a large, and especially to a shifting, human environment whose approval is sought. These conditions are not effectually met on the lower levels of savagery, such as human culture must have been during the early days of the use of tools. Accordingly, relatively little of the emulative spirit is seen in communities that have retained the archaic, peaceable constitution, or that have reverted to it from a higher culture. In such communities a low standard of culture and comfort goes along with an absence of strenuous application to the work in hand, as well as a relative absence of jealousy and gradations of rank. Notions of economic rank and discrimination between persons, whether in point of possessions or in point of comfort, are almost, if not altogether, in abeyance.

With a further development of the use of tools and of human command over the forces of the environment, the habits of life of the savage group change. There is likely to be more of aggression, both in the way of a pursuit of large game and in the way of conflict between groups. As the industrial efficiency of the group increases, and as weapons are brought to greater perfec-

tion, the incentives to aggression and the opportunities for achievement along this line increase. The conditions favorable to emulation are more fully met. With the increasing density of population that follows from a heightened industrial efficiency, the group passes, by force of circumstances, from the archaic condition of poverty-stricken peace to a stage of predatory life. This fighting stage — the beginning of barbarism — may involve aggressive predation, or the group may simply be placed on the defensive. One or the other, or both the lines of activity — and commonly both, no doubt — will be forced upon the group, on pain of extermination. This has apparently been the usual course of early social evolution.

When a group emerges into this predatory phase of its development, the employments which most occupy men's attention are employments that involve exploit. The most serious concern of the group, and at the same time the direction in which the most spectacular effect may be achieved by the individual, is conflict with men and beasts. It becomes easy to make a telling comparison between men when their work is a series of exploits carried out against these difficult adversaries or against the formidable movements of the elements. The assertion of the strong hand, successful aggression, usually of a destructive character, becomes the accepted basis of repute. The dominant life interest of the group throws its strong light upon this creditable employment of force and sagacity, and the other, obscurer ways of serving the group's life fall into the background. The guiding animus of the group becomes a militant one, and men's actions are judged from the standpoint of the fighting man. What is recognized, without reflection and without misgiving, as serviceable and effective in such a group is fighting capacity. Exploit becomes the conventional ground of invidious comparison between individuals, and repute comes to rest on prowess.

As the predatory culture reaches a fuller development, there comes a distinction between employments. The tradition of prowess, as the virtue *par excellence*, gains in scope and consistency until prowess comes near being recognized as the sole virtue. Those employments alone are then worthy and reputable

which involve the exercise of this virtue. Other employments, in which men are occupied with tamely shaping inert materials to human use, become unworthy and end with becoming debasing. The honorable man must not only show capacity for predatory exploit, but he must also avoid entanglement with the occupations that do not involve exploit. The tame employments, those that involve no obvious destruction of life and no spectacular coercion of refractory antagonists, fall into disrepute and are relegated to those members of the community who are defective in predatory capacity; that is to say, those who are lacking in massiveness, agility, or ferocity. Occupation in these employments argues that the person so occupied falls short of that decent modicum of prowess which would entitle him to be graded as a man in good standing. In order to an unsullied reputation, the appearance of evil must be avoided. Therefore the able-bodied barbarian of the predatory culture, who is at all mindful of his good name, severely leaves all uneventful drudgery to the women and minors of the group. He puts in his time in the manly arts of war and devotes his talents to devising ways and means of disturbing the peace. That way lies honor.

In the barbarian scheme of life the peaceable, industrial employments are women's work. They imply defective force, incapacity for aggression or devastation, and are therefore not of good report. But whatever is accepted as a conventional mark of a shortcoming or a vice comes presently to be accounted intrinsically base. In this way industrial occupations fall under a polite odium and are apprehended to be substantially ignoble. They are unsportsmanlike. Labor carries a taint, and all contamination from vulgar employments must be shunned by self-respecting men.

Where the predatory culture has developed in full consistency, the common-sense apprehension that labor is ignoble has developed into the further refinement that labor is wrong—for those who are not already beneath reproach. Hence certain well-known features of caste and tabu. In the further cultural development, when some wealth has been accumulated and the members of the community fall into a servile class on the one hand

and a leisure class on the other, the tradition that labor is ignoble gains an added significance. It is not only a mark of inferior force, but it is also a perquisite of the poor. This is the situation today. Labor is morally impossible by force of the ancient tradition that has come down from early barbarism, and it is shameful by force of its evil association with poverty. It is indecorous.

The irksomeness of labor is a spiritual fact; it lies in the indignity of the thing. The fact of its irksomeness is, of course, none the less real and cogent for its being of a spiritual kind. Indeed, it is all the more substantial and irremediable on that account. Physical irksomeness and distastefulness can be borne, if only the spiritual incentive is present. Witness the attractiveness of warfare, both to the barbarian and to the civilized youth. The most common-place recital of a campaigner's experience carries a sweeping suggestion of privation, exposure, fatigue, vermin, squalor, sickness, and loathsome death; the incidents and accessories of war are said to be unsavory, unsightly, unwholesome beyond the power of words; yet warfare is an attractive employment if one only is gifted with a suitable habit of mind. Most sports, and many other polite employments that are distressing but creditable, are evidence to the same effect.

Physical irksomeness is an incommodity which men habitually make light of if it is not reinforced by the sanction of decorum; but it is otherwise with the spiritual irksomeness of such labor as is condemned by polite usage. That is a cultural fact. There is no remedy for this kind of irksomeness, short of a subversion of that cultural structure on which our canons of decency rest. Appeal may of course be made to taste and conscience to set aside the conventional aversion to labor; such an appeal is made from time to time by well-meaning and sanguine persons, and some fitful results have been achieved in that way. But the commonplace, common-sense man is bound by the deliverances of common-sense decorum on this head—the heritage of an unbroken cultural line of descent that runs back to the beginning.

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