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Attractive Labour

Charles Fourier

1971

In the civilized mechanism we find everywhere composite unhappiness instead of composite charm. Let us judge of it by the case of labor. It is, says the Scripture very justly, a punishment of man: Adam and his issue are condemned to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. That, already, is an affliction; but this labor, this ungrateful labor upon which depends the earning of our miserable bread, we cannot even get it! a laborer lacks the labor upon which his maintenance depends – he asks in vain for a tribulation! He suffers a second, that of obtaining work at times whose fruit is his master's and not his, or of being employed in duties to which he is entirely unaccustomed. . . . The civilized laborer suffers a third affliction through the maladies with which he is generally stricken by the excess of labor demanded by his master.

He suffers a fifth affliction, that of being despised and treated as a beggar because he lacks those necessities which he consents to purchase by the anguish of repugnant labor. He suffers, finally, a sixth affliction, in that he will obtain neither advancement nor sufficient wages, and that to the vexation of present suffering is added the perspective of future suffering, and of being sent to the gallows should he demand that labor which he may lack to-morrow.

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Labor, nevertheless, forms the delight of various creatures, such as beavers, bees, wasps, ants, which are entirely at liberty to prefer inertia: but God has provided them with a social mechanism which attracts to industry, and causes happiness to be found in industry. Why should he not have accorded us the same favor as these animals? What a difference between their industrial condition and ours! A Russian, an Algerian, work from fear of the lash or the bastinado; an Englishman, a Frenchman, from fear of the famine which stalks close to his poor household; the Greeks and the Romans, whose freedom has been vaunted to us, worked as slaves, and from fear of punishment, like the Negroes in the colonies today.

Associative labor, in order to exert a strong attraction upon people, will have to differ in every particular from the repulsive conditions which render it so odious in the existing state of things. It is necessary, in order that it become attractive, that associative labor fulfill the following seven conditions:

1. That every laborer be a partner, remunerated by dividends and not by wages.
2. That every one, man, woman, or child, be remunerated in proportion to the three faculties, *capital, labor, and talent*.
3. That the industrial sessions be varied about eight times a day, it being impossible to sustain enthusiasm longer than an hour and a half or two hours in the exercise of agricultural or manufacturing labor.
4. That they be carried on by bands of friends, united spontaneously, interested and stimulated by very active rivalries.
5. That the workshops and husbandry offer the laborer the allurements of elegance and cleanliness.

6. That the division of labor be carried to the last degree, so that each sex and age may devote itself to duties that are suited to it.
7. That in this distribution, each one, man, woman, or child, be in full enjoyment of the right to labor or the right to engage in such branch of labor as they may please to select, provided they give proof of integrity and ability.

Finally, that, in this new order, people possess a guarantee of well-being, of a minimum sufficient for the present and the future, and that this guarantee free them from all uneasiness concerning themselves and their families.

We find all these properties combined in the associative mechanism, whose discovery I make public.

In order to attain happiness, it is necessary to introduce it into the labors which engage the greater part of our lives. Life is a long torment to one who pursues occupations without attraction. Morality teaches us to love work: let it know, then, how to render work lovable, and, first of all, let it introduce luxury into, husbandry and the workshop. If the arrangements are poor, repulsive, how arouse industrial attraction?

In work, as in pleasure, variety is evidently the desire of nature. Any enjoyment prolonged, without interruption, beyond two hours, conduces to satiety, to abuse, blunts our faculties, and exhausts pleasure. A repast of four hours will not pass off without excess; an opera of four hours will end by cloying the spectator. Periodical variety is a necessity of the body and of the soul, a necessity in all nature; even the soil requires alteration of seeds, and seed alteration of soil. The stomach will soon reject the best dish if it be offered every day, and the soul will be blunted in the exercise of any virtue if it be not relieved by some other virtue.

If there is need of variety in pleasure after indulging in it for two hours, so much the more does labor require this diversity, which is

continual in the associative state, and is guaranteed to the poor as well as the rich.

The chief source of light-heartedness among Harmonians is the frequent change of sessions. Life is a perpetual torment to our workmen, who are obliged to spend twelve, and frequently fifteen, consecutive hours in some tedious labor. Even ministers are not exempt; we find some of them complain of having passed an entire day in the stupefying task of affixing signatures to thousands of official vouchers. Such wearisome duties are unknown in the associative order; the Harmonians, who devote an hour, an hour and a half, or at most two hours, to the different sessions, and who, in these short sessions, are sustained by cabalistic impulses and by friendly union with selected associates, cannot fail to bring and to find cheerfulness everywhere.

The radical evil of our industrial system is the employment of the laborer in a single occupation, which runs the risk of coming to a stand-still. The fifty thousand workmen of Lyons who are beggars to-day (besides fifty thousand women and children), would be scattered over two or three hundred phalanxes, which would make silk their principal article of manufacture, and which would not be thrown out by a year or two of stagnation in that branch of industry. If at the end of that time their factory should fail completely, they would start one of a different kind, without having stopped work, without ever making their daily subsistence dependent upon a continuation or suspension of outside orders.

In a progressive series all the groups acquire so much the more skill in that their work is greatly subdivided, and that every member engages only in the kind in which he professes to excel. The heads of the Series, spurred on to study by rivalry, bring to their work the knowledge of a student of the first rank. The subordinates are inspired with an ardor which laughs at all obstacles, and with a fanaticism for the maintenance of the honor of the Series against rival districts. In the heat of action they accomplish what seems humanly impossible, like the French grenadiers who scaled the rocks

of Mahon, and who, upon the day following, were unable, in cold blood, to clamber up the rock which they had assailed under the fire of the enemy. Such are the progressive Series in their work; every obstacle vanishes before the intense pride which dominates them; they would grow angry at the word *impossible*, and the most daunting kinds of labor, such as managing the soil, are to them the lightest of sports. If we could to-day behold an organized district, behold at early dawn thirty industrial groups issue in state from the palace of the Phalanx, and spread themselves over the fields and the workshops, waving their banners with cries of triumph and impatience, we should think we were gazing at bands of madmen intent upon putting the neighboring districts to fire and sword. Such will be the athletes who will take the place of our mercenary and languid workmen, and who will succeed in making ambrosia and nectar grow upon a soil which yields only briars and tares to the feeble hands of the civilized.