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EDITORIAL

YOUNG FIGURES AND OLD FICTION.

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ALMOST a whole page of the San Francisco *Chronicle* of March 6 is taken up with an effort on the part of John P. Young to "demonstrate with figures and facts" that Marx was off his base when he claimed that the trend of capitalism is to centralize production and thereby smoke out ever larger masses of the people, bigger capitalists absorbing the smaller. According to the gentleman, the trend of things is in exactly the opposite direction: "the chances of becoming a capitalist are increasing." In proof of the claim figures are copiously used.

Young are the figures of Mr. Young: they are up-to-date; but old is the fiction the figures are expected to put a backbone of youth into.

Mr. Young gives the figures for the original owners of sixty-seven concerns in Great Britain as hardly "exceeding a couple of hundred"; similarly in the United States originally, both in industry and agriculture. Now, however, those British industries number 17,661 partners, and in the United States the stockholders of railways, for instance, have risen to 500,000; of the steel corporation they have climbed up to 110,000; while the number of industrial establishments rose, from 355,415 in 1890, to 512,245 in 1900; and the number of farms increased, from 1,449,073 in 1850, to 5,737,372 in 1900. From these decidedly young figures Mr. Young concludes that the increased number of stockholders obviously indicates an increased number of persons who "own and operate for their benefit" the concerns in which the stock is held; that the "opportunities to engage in business on individual account" are likewise obviously on the increase; finally that, obviously, not "monopoly" is the trend of capitalism, but obviously a spreading of individual economic independence.

The trouble with Mr. Young's figures is that, correct though they may be as far as they go, they are incorrect when stated all alone. In other words, they state only a fractional truth; and fractional truths are the tallest of falsehoods.

As to the number of establishments, they have increased—on paper. It may not have been an oversight on the part of Mr. Young to omit mention of the Standard Oil. The revelations that have been recently made concerning the multiplicity of names which the identical Standard Oil assumes in different localities give, upon a large scale, an idea of what happens, on a smaller scale, in all other lines of industry, mining, railroading, manufacturing, meat packing, etc., agriculture included. The investigations that have recently been conducted of the Standard Oil have uncovered the fact that oil plants, which were considered and held themselves out as independent and individual concerns, were but limbs of the identical Trust. In Texas the plant had one name, in Missouri another, in Ohio and New Jersey still other names and so forth; but all these names were aliases for the one name—Standard Oil. While in some instances there may be an actual increase of independent concerns, these instances, besides being purely transitory, are so few that they mark an actual decrease, when compared with the increased population. In most instances what has actually increased is the names of concerns—a fact that is met at every turn, is uncovered at every investigation, and is so well known as not to be open to discussion. The mask of an alias is not assumed when there is no ugly and robusitious fact to conceal.

As to the number of stockholders, their increase also is a deception. When the Illinois Central had its recent rumpus, a handful of men were found holding the controlling number of shares. The New York Central boasts of its popular character and "non-monopoly nature" by claiming 10,000 stockholders, when in fact probably not more than 50 individuals own an overwhelming majority of the shares. Similarly with the Steel and all other corporations whose magnitude is such as to draw suspicion upon themselves. All of these resort to the double manoeuvre of spreading stocks to conceal the fact of actual monopoly in the hands of a few, and of seeking to deceive the small holders with the belief that they are partners, when in fact these small holders have less than nothing to say.

The aliases to which corporations resort may all deceive the people some times, and may deceive some people all the time, but can not deceive all the people all the time. The cold steel of the fact of steady concentration is bound to enter the soul of the densest.—And then? Likewise with the deception concerning the "large number of holders." The "illusion of property" may long cling to its victim; but the same inexorable economic law that decrees concentration also dispels the illusion. When that which was held to be "property," that is, to have the power protect the life of the holder, is discovered to have no purpose other than to dull his senses in order that his pockets may be all the more easily be picked, then the illusion turns into a force that makes for revolution.

And this is just what is happening. How otherwise account for newspaper page-long and labored efforts to prove what Mr. Young holds and repeatedly asserts to be "obvious"? The only thing obvious in the case is that, however young the figures, they can not galvanize into youth the old fiction that capitalism increases opportunities for the masses.

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