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EDITORIAL

WHO ARE THE TEASPOONERS?

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THE late Walter A. Wyckoff, the so-called “tramp professor” of Princeton, used to tell the following story:

“Isn’t it a shame, George, to shovel dirt that way?” asked one of two workmen watching a steam shovel in action.

“How so?” said George.

“Why, that machine is taking the bread out of the mouths of 500 men that would be required to do the same work with hand shovels.”

“George laughed. ‘Go on!’ he said; ‘you don’t reason right. Look here—if this steam digging would give work to 500 men with shovels, why not get 5,000 men with teaspoons for the job?’”

George was right. Yet to-day, who are the tea-spooners?

It is not the revolutionary-enlightened workmen;—they least of all. They know that economical and copious production is the keystone of the arch of plenty which they hope to rear over the future society. They know that good will and brotherly-love are but wisps of beautiful dream-pictures, without that abundant productivity which implies the most improved manner of machinery. Hence a social revolutionist can never be a tea-spooner.

There remain but two other sets of persons who can fall into that class, and in both cases their outlook is based upon hopelessness. One is the non-revolutionary workingman; the other is the capitalist. Both of these may, and occasionally do, become advocates of teaspoon methods in industry.

First, the non-revolutionary workingman. His horizon is bounded by capitalism. Like the world-engirdling snake of Asgard, capitalism ever was, and ever will be. As John Mitchell, presuming to talk for the coal mine workers said, “he has given up all hope of ever being anything else but a wage-earner.” No thought of a better system sheds its guiding ray upon him; he seeks but to ease his chains under the

present one. To such an one, the mission of advanced machinery, mainly to release the race from the sordid grubbing for an existence, is a sealed book. His mind closed to that fact, he can see in the improved tool only a competitor, a menace to his job. Hence he swears by the teaspoon, and passes resolutions in his craft union against the steam-shovel.

But far more vicious and harmful to society than the occasionally tea-spooning workingman is the constantly tea-spooning capitalist. To him also, capitalism is as it was in the beginning and evermore shall be. Whereas with the non-revolutionary workingman it was ignorance alone, here it is both ignorance and self-interest combined which shut out the conception of a superior social system, and render the outlook for better things hopeless. Make hay while the sun shines, becomes the capitalist motto. Prices must be kept up, therefore vast agricultural areas are left untilled, and factory production curtailed. Trust plants must run at a profit, therefore competitors are bought and closed down. New machinery means a dead loss on the old equipment, therefore patents are locked in the safe and never utilized. Hosts of men and women must be employed to boost and run one's own business, and to outwit competitors, therefore they are withdrawn from productive activity. With all due credit for the mechanical advances it has made, capitalism still stands as the world's monumental squanderer of men and forces. The capitalist is the main tea-spooner.

History has it that some hundred years ago, when the steam loom began to displace the hand loom, the starving weavers of Britain and Scotland vented their despair on the new looms, smashing them to bits. But that did not destroy steam weaving. No more than the spirit of mechanical progress did then suffer itself to be retarded for the temporary advantage of labor, will it now allow itself to be throttled for the temporary advantage of capital. Mechanical development of production will brook no halt. Teaspoons and tea-spoonism lie directly in the path of civilization's broom; and the capitalist is the chief tea-spooner.

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