



THE
PARABLE of the WATER TANK

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WHEN READ PLEASE PASS ON.

“THE PARABLE OF THE WATER TANK.”

“That will do, George. We will close the session here. Our discussion, I find, has taken a broader range than I expected, and to complete the subject we shall need to have a brief session this afternoon.—And now, by the way of concluding the morning, I propose to offer a little contribution of my own. The other day, at the museum, I was delving among the relics of literature of the great Revolution, with a view to finding something that might illustrate our theme. I came across a little pamphlet of the period, yellow and almost undecipherable, which, on examination, I found to be a rather amusing skit or satirical take-off on the profit system. It struck me that probably our lesson might prepare us to appreciate it, and I made a copy. It is entitled ‘The Parable of the Water Tank,’ and runs this way:

“There was a certain very dry land, the people whereof were in sore need of water. And they did nothing but to seek after water from morning until night, and many perished because they could not find it.

“Howbeit, there were certain men in that land who were more crafty and diligent than the rest, and these had gathered stores of water where others could find none, and the name of these men was called capitalists. And it came to pass that the people of the land came unto the capitalists and prayed them that they would give of the water that they might

drink, for their need was sore. But the capitalists answered them and said:

“Go to, ye silly people! why should we give you of the water which we have gathered, for then we should become even as ye are, and perish with you? But behold what we will do unto you. Be ye our servants and ye shall have water.” “And the people said, ‘Only give us to drink and we will be your servants, we and our children.’ And it was so.

“Now, the capitalists were men of understanding, and wise in their generation. They ordered the people who were their servants in bands with captains and officers, and some they put at the springs to dip, and others did they make to carry the water, and others did they cause to seek for new springs. And all the water was brought together in one place, and there did the capitalists make a great tank for to hold it, and the tank was called the Market, for it was there that the people, even the servants of the capitalists, came to get water. And the capitalists, said unto the people:

“For every bucket of water that ye bring to us, that we may pour it into the tank, which is the Market, behold! we will give you a penny, but for every bucket that we shall draw forth to give unto you that ye may drink of it, ye and your wives and your children, ye shall give to us two pennies, and the difference shall be our profit, seeing that if it were not for this profit we should not do this thing for you, but ye should all perish.”

“And it was good in the people’s eyes for they were dull of understanding, and they

diligently brought water unto the tank for many days, and for every bucket which they did bring the capitalists gave them every man a penny; but for every bucket that the capitalists drew forth from the tank to give again unto the people, behold! the people rendered to the capitalists two pennies.

“And after many days the water tank, which was the Market, overflowed at the top, seeing that for every bucket the people poured in they received only so much as would buy again half of a bucket. And because of the excess that was left of every bucket, did the tank overflow, for the people were many, but the capitalists were few, and could drink no more than others. Therefore did the tank overflow.

“And when the capitalists saw that the water overflowed, they said to the people:

“See ye not the tank, which is the Market, doth overflow? Sit ye down, therefore and be patient, for ye shall bring us no more water till the tank be empty.”

“But when the people no more received the pennies of the capitalists for the water they brought, they could buy no more water from the capitalists having naught therewith to buy. And when the capitalists saw that they had no more profit because no man bought water of them, they were troubled. And they sent forth men in the highways, the byways, and the hedges, crying “If any thirst let him come to the tank and buy water of us, for it doth overflow.” For they said among themselves, “Behold, the times are dull; we must advertise.”

“But the people answered, saying: “How can we buy unless ye hire us, for how else shall we have where withal to buy? Hire ye us, therefore, as before, and we will gladly buy water, for we thirst, and ye will have no need to advertise.” But the capitalist said to the people: “Shall we hire you to bring water when the tank, which is the Market, doth already overflow? Buy ye, therefore, first water, and when the tank is empty, through your buying, will we hire you again.” And so it was because the capitalists hired them no more to bring water that the people could not buy the water they had bought already, the capitalists no more hired them to bring water. And the saying went abroad. “It is a crisis.”

“And the thirst of the people was great, for it was not now as it had been in the days of their fathers, when the land was open before them, for everyone to seek water for himself, seeing that the capitalists had taken all the springs, and the wells, and the water-wheels and the vessels and the buckets, so that no man might come by water save from the tank, which was the Market. And the people murmured against the capitalists and said: “Behold the tank runneth over, and we die

of thirst. Give us therefore, of the water, that we perish not.”

“But the capitalists answered: “Not so. The water is ours. Ye shall not drink thereof unless ye buy it of us with pennies.” And they confirmed it with an oath, saying after their manner, “Business is business.”

“But the capitalists were disquieted that the people bought no more water, whereby they had no more any profits, and they spake to one another saying: “It seemeth that our profits have stopped our profits, and by reason of the profits we have made, we can make no more profits. How is it that our profits are become unprofitable to us, and gains do make us poor? Let us therefore send for the soothsayers, and they may interpret this thing unto us,” and they sent for them.

“Now, the soothsayers were men learned in dark sayings, who joined themselves to the capitalists by reason of the water of the capitalists, that they might have thereof and live, they and their children. And they spake for the capitalists, unto the people, and did their embassies for them, seeing that the capitalists were not a folk quick of understanding neither ready of speech.

“And the capitalists demanded of the soothsayers that they should interpret this thing unto them, wherefore it was that the people bought no more water of them, although the tank was full. And certain of the soothsayers answered and said, “It is by reason of over-production,” and some said, “It is glut” but the signification of the two words is the same. And others said, “Nay, but this thing is by reason of the spots on the sun.” And yet others answered, saying, “It is neither by reason or glut, nor yet of spots on the sun that this devil hath come to pass, but because of lack of confidence.”

“And while the soothsayers contended among themselves, according to their manner, the men of profit did slumber and sleep, and when they awoke they said to the soothsayers: “It is enough. Ye have spoken comfortably unto us. Now go ye forth and speak comfortably likewise unto this people, so that they be at rest and leave us also in peace.”

“But the soothsayers even the men of the dismal science—for so they were named of some—were loath to go forth to the people lest they should be stoned, for the people loved them not. And they said to the capitalists:

“Masters, it is a mystery of our craft that if men be full and thirst not but be at rest, then shall they find comfort in our speech even as ye. Yet if they thirst and be empty, find they no comfort therein but rather mock us, for it seemeth that unless a man be full our wisdom appeareth unto him but emptiness.” But the capitalists said: “Go ye forth. Are ye not our men to do our embassies?”

“And the soothsayers went forth to the people and expounded to them the mystery of overproduction and how it was that they must needs perish of thirst because there was overmuch water, and how there could not be enough because there was too much. And likewise spoke they unto the people concerning the sun spots, and also wherefore it was that these things had come upon them by reason of lack of confidence. And it was even as the soothsayers had said, for the people their wisdom seemed emptiness. And the people reviled them, saying: “Go up, ye bald-heads! Will ye mock us? Doth Plenty breed famine? Doth nothing come out of much?” And they took up stones to stone them.

“And when the capitalists saw that the people still murmured and would not give ear to the soothsayers, and because also they feared lest they should come upon the tank and take of the water by force, they brought forth to them certain holy men (but they were false priests), who spake unto the people that they should be quiet and trouble not the capitalists because they thirsted. And these holy men, who were false priests, testified to the people that this affliction was sent to them of God for the healing of their souls, and that if they bear it in patience and lust not after the water, neither trouble the capitalists, it would come to pass that after they had given up the ghost they would come to a country where there should be no capitalists and an abundance of water. Howbeit, there were certain true prophets of God also, and these had compassion on the people and would not prophesy for the capitalists, but rather spake constantly against them.

“Now, when the capitalists saw that the people still murmured and would not be still, neither for the words of the soothsayers nor of the false priests, they came forth themselves unto them and put the ends of their fingers in the water that overflowed in the tank and wet the tips thereof, and they scattered the drops from the tips of their fingers abroad upon the people who thronged the tank, and the name of the drops was charity, and they were exceedingly bitter.

“And when the capitalists saw yet again that neither for the words of the soothsayers, nor of the holy men who were false priests, nor yet for the drops that were called charity, would the people be still, but raged the more and crowded upon the tank as if they would take it by force, then took they counsel together and sent men privily forth among the people. And these men sought out the mightiest among the people and all who had skill in war, and took them apart and spake craftily with them, saying:

““Come, now, why cast ye not your lot in with the capitalists? If ye will be their men and serve them against the people, that they break not in upon the tank, then shall ye

have abundance of water, that ye perish not, ye and your children.”

“And the mighty men and they who were skilled in war hearkened unto this speech and suffered themselves to be persuaded, for thirst constrained them, and they went within unto the capitalists and smote the people when they thronged upon the tank.

“And after many days the water was low in the tank, for the capitalists did make fountains and fish ponds of the water thereof, and did bath therein, they and their wives and children, and did waste the water for their pleasure.”

“And when the Capitalists saw that the tank was empty, they said, “The crisis is ended;” and they sent forth and hired the people that they should bring water to fill it again. And for the water that the people brought to the tank they received for every bucket a penny, but for the water which the capitalists drew forth from the tank to give again to the people they received two pennies, that they might have their profits. And after a time did the tank again overflow even as before.

“And now, when many times the people had filled the tank until it overflowed, and had thirsted until the water therein had been wasted by the capitalists, it came to pass that there arose in the land certain men who were called agitators, for that they did stir up the people. And they spake to the people saying that they should associate, and then would they have no need to be servants of the capitalists and should thirst no more for water. And in the eyes of the capitalists were the agitators pestilent fellows, and they would fain have crucified them, but durst not for fear of the people.

“And the words of the agitators which they spake to the people were on this wise:

“Ye foolish people, how long will ye be deceived by a lie, and believe to your hurt that which is not? for behold all those things that have been said unto you by the capitalists and by the soothsayers are cunning-devised fables. And likewise the holy men who say that it was the will of God that ye should always be poor and miserable and athirst, behold they do blaspheme God and are liars, whom he will bitterly judge though he forgive all others, How cometh it that ye may not come by the water in the tank? Is it not because ye have no money? And why have ye no money? It is because ye receive but one penny for every bucket that ye bring to the tank, which is the Market, but must render two pennies for every bucket ye take out, so that the capitalists may have their profit. See ye not how by this means the tank must overflow, being filled by that ye lack and made to abound out of your emptiness? See ye not also that the harder ye toil and the more diligently ye seek and bring the water, the worse and not the better it shall be for you by reason of the profit, and

that forever!"

"After this manner spake the agitators for many days unto the people, and none heeded them, but it was so that after a time the people hearkened. And they answered and said unto the agitators.

"Ye say truth. It is because of the capitalists and of their profits that we want, seeing that by reason of them and their profits we may by no means come by the fruit of our labour, so that our labour is in vain, and the more we toil to fill the tank the sooner doth it overflow, and we may receive nothing because there is too much according to the words of the soothsayers. But behold, the capitalists are hard men and their tender mercies are cruel. Tell us if ye know any way whereby we may deliver ourselves out of our bondage unto them. But if ye know of no certain way of deliverance we beseech you to hold your peace and let us alone, that we may forget our misery."

"And the agitators answered and said, "We know a way."

"And the people said: "Deceive us not, for this thing hath been from the beginning, and none hath found a way of deliverance until now, though many have sought it carefully with tears. But if ye know a way, speak unto us quickly."

"Then the agitators spake unto the people of the way. And they said:

"Behold, what need have ye at all of these capitalists, that ye should yield them profits upon your labour? What great thing do they wherefore ye render them this tribute? Lo! it is only because they do order you in bands and lead you out and in and set your tasks and afterward give you a little of the water yourselves have brought and not they. Now behold the way out of this bondage! Do ye for yourselves that which is done by the capitalists—namely, the ordering of your labour, and the marshalling of your bands, and the dividing of your tasks. So shall we have no need at all of the capitalists and no more yield to them any profit, but all the fruit of your labour shall ye share as brethren, everyone having the same; and so shall the tank never overflow until every man is full, and would not wag his tongue for more, and afterward shall ye with the overflow make pleasant fountains and fish ponds to delight yourselves withal even as did the capitalists; but these shall be for the delight of all."

"And the people answered, "How shall we go about to do this thing, for it seemeth good to us?"

"And the agitators answered: "Choose ye discreet men to go in and out before you and to marshal your bands and order your labour, and these men shall be as the capitalists were; but, behold, they shall not be your

masters as the capitalists are, but your brethren and officers who do your will and they shall not take any profits, but every man his share like the others, that there may be no more masters and servants among you, but brethren only. And from time to time, as ye see fit, ye shall choose other discreet men in place of the first to order the labour."

"And the people hearkened, and the thing was very good to them. Likewise seemed it not a hard thing. And with one voice they cried out, "So let it be as ye have said, for we will do it!"

"And the capitalists heard the noise and of the shouting and what the people said, and the soothsayers heard it also, and likewise the false priests and the mighty men of war, who were a defence unto the capitalists; and when they heard they trembled exceedingly, so that their knees smote together, and they said one to another, "It is the end of us!"

"Howbeit, there were certain true priests of the living God who would not prophesy for the capitalists, but had compassion on the people; and when they heard the shouting of the people and what they said, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy, and gave thanks to God because of the deliverance.

"And the people went and did all the things that were told them of the agitators to do. And it came to pass as the agitators had said, even according to all their words. And there was no more any thirst in that land, neither any that was ahungered, nor naked, nor cold, nor in any manner of want; and every man said unto his fellow, "My brother," and every woman said unto her companion, "My sister," for so were they with one another as brethren and sisters which do dwell together in unity. And the blessing of God rested upon that land forever."

