THE COMING WAVE OF PROSPERITY AND THE RESPONSIBILITIES IT BRINGS TO US AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A NATION

SelDOM has a new year opened with more glowing prophecies for future achievement and prosperity than greeted us during the first week or two of the present year. Newspapers outdid themselves in presenting favorable statistics and in forecasting events which were bound to make the next eleven or twelve months significant in the history of modern progress. New inventions, scientific discoveries, great public enterprises and a period of unexampled prosperity were among the good things confidently predicted, and indeed it looks as if the prophecy were not so much the result of optimism as conclusions drawn correctly from existing conditions.

After a period of depression lasting a little more than two years, the pendulum seems to have swung to the opposite extreme. Confidence is restored; business enterprise has received a new and tremendous impetus, and many great enterprises tending to the advance of civilization, the conservation or development of priceless natural resources and the general welfare of humanity, are either well under way or are drawing to a successful conclusion. The prospect for an adjustment of international relations, upon a better and sounder basis than has ever been known in the history of the world, is growing steadily more favorable; certain important legal decisions and legislative action that will go far toward solving some of the knottiest problems in the contest between capital and labor, as well as between the trusts and the people, are expected within the next few months; extensive plans are afoot for immensely increasing transportation facilities; there is a good prospect of employment for every man and woman who is able and willing to work, and last, but by no means least, there is the promise of record-breaking crops all over the country.

Better even than these material benefits, there is a growing strength and steadiness in our attitude as a people toward our great national problems. Our ideas of democracy have broadened considerably during the past decade, and are now based less upon sentiment and bombast and more upon intelligent understanding of the conditions and demands of the present age. The tendency to centralize more power in the federal government is bringing to the people a stronger realization of their own responsibility in the matter of selecting honest and efficient representatives, and a disposition to demand honesty and efficiency in all branches of the government. Also, the agitation in favor of taking effective measures to conserve our natural resources is bearing its fruit in a widespread understanding of the subject and a general disposition to put a stop to the reckless waste and misappropriation that hitherto has been permitted to flourish almost unchecked, and, as a natural outgrowth of thought along these lines, we find the well-established beginnings of a total change in our attitude toward agri-
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culture. The thoughtless greed that once was content to crop the soil year after year until it was exhausted of all its power for fertility, and then abandon it for fresher regions to be exhausted in their turn, is being gradually stamped out by the unrelenting efforts of the wiser heads among us to restore farming to its former dignity, interest and profit by establishing such methods of farming and such conditions of farm life as will make it an occupation well worth all the knowledge, energy and skill that the most intelligent and enterprising man could devote to it.

While in many minds there is still a conviction that the concentration of capital and the wonderfully effective organization of great industrial and commercial concerns threaten both our prosperity and our liberties as a people, the tendency nevertheless seems to be unchecked. On the contrary, it has gained such headway that much greater combinations are in sight than we even dreamed of a few years ago. Far from dividing their forces into smaller enterprises, there is more than a possibility that the powerful trusts and the great banking interests of the country will shortly be united into one vast and well-organized financial power, and that the leading railway systems will effect a similar combination for the sake of increased economy and efficiency. Under the circumstances that obtained a few years ago, this tendency might be regarded as conveying an overwhelming menace to our welfare as a nation, but, with the awakened sense of responsibility that has come to us during the past few years, there is every reason to believe that organization upon such an enormous scale will simply mean greater economy and increased power of achievement, rather than greater license in the matter of appropriating and monopolizing the property of the nation. There is the more hope for this because the attention of all the thinking people in the country is now directed toward the operations of the great financial and industrial concerns, and they are beginning to understand that organization on a large scale and perfect discipline down to the smallest detail does not necessarily mean dishonesty and unfair methods of competition. On the other hand, the leaders of these great enterprises, grasping and unscrupulous as they have shown themselves to be, will hardly be willing to risk constant warfare and inevitable final defeat to gain their ends dishonestly when they have the equipment and every possible opportunity to succeed by fair means, and with the consent and cooperation of the people rather than against the strong tide of their distrust and active enmity.

One specially hopeful element in the situation is the steady growth of the feeling of social responsibility, which is doing more than anything else to pave the way toward a better adjustment of relations between capital and labor. We grow very pessimistic at times over the inequalities of opportunity and the unfair division of wealth, but the rising tide of public opinion is actually compelling the restoration to the people of immense sums of money. No matter in what form the restitution comes,—whether it take the guise of philanthropy, social improvement or downright charity,—it nevertheless is returning to the people a part of what belongs to them, and it is only a matter of time when the people themselves will be in a position to see that an equitable division takes place in the beginning instead of at the end. One strong force that is working toward this end is the colonization of large manufactories in parts of the country that are either undeveloped or sparsely settled. This brings both managers and workmen face to face with pioneer conditions, and the inevitable result is to make possible not only a closer and more human relation between them, but also to develop greater resourcefulness and self-reliance in meeting the problems of both life and work.

This is the bright side of the picture, but the outlook for this year, considered as a whole, has no very dark shadows. At all events, the optimistic point of view is inevitably constructive and pessimism at best is only another name for disintegra-
olution. But with unexampled prosperity and progress in view in the near future, we cannot but feel a sense of responsibility even heavier than the anxiety which accompanied the hard times. We have had a hard pull throughout the past two years, and it is only human nature to feel that we are entitled to a little ease when things are again running smoothly. Yet now is the time for even greater alertness and more unceasing vigilance than we were forced to exercise during the dark days of the panic. When the pressure came and credit was shaken in every direction, we took in sail, practiced the most rigid economy and made every effort to start the machinery of the financial, industrial and commercial world to running smoothly again. In doing this we were buoyed up by the feeling that not only were we meeting and conquering adversity, but that we were planting the seeds of future prosperity. Now we feel that the harvest is ripening and that we are fully entitled to reap it as we will.

But just now is the time to remember that the true significance of prosperity is that it widens our sphere of action and so adds to our responsibilities. One great cause of weakness and corruption in our national life has been that we did not know how to take prosperity when it came to us. We accepted the fact that periods of depression and of expansion in the financial world alternated like the ebb and flow of the tide, nor did we take special pains in the fat years to provide for the lean ones. Our natural resources were so great that they seemed endless, and in our easy-going extravagance we spent freely the money that was made so easily and had no care of the future, either as individuals or as a nation. The individual lack of forethought was bad enough, because in the aggregate it meant a carelessness on the part of the whole people that resulted in the abuses we are now fighting against and bitterly deploiring. Because of this indolence and indifference where subjects important to the nation’s welfare were concerned we not only allowed the property of the whole community to slip into the hands of the shrewd and greedy few, but we recklessly gave away public lands, water powers, forests and coal fields by granting special privileges and valuable franchises to men who were clever enough to see the value of them and selfish and dishonest enough to attempt to monopolize them. Then we legislated with frenzied energy against the natural consequences of our own acts, and the result was either laws that could not be enforced or an absolute lack of the kind of interest that takes pains to enforce them. Spurred by the discontent that comes with hard times, we have fought bitterly against the abuses which our own sloth and indifference fastened upon our national life, but the question now is, will we still fight after prosperity returns to us or will we fall back into the old weak, good-natured policy of laissez faire? If the past has taught us nothing, this is exactly what will happen, but if we have learned the lesson of the hard times, we will know that prosperity and progress can be made permanent only by taking care of the future, guarding our rights against encroachment and seeing to it that better conditions are established upon a basis firm enough to endure.

For the first time in the history of the world, we are confronted with a surplus of resources and production instead of a deficit. Also, our social order for the first time in history is growing more and more into a genuine democracy, based upon a recognition of the right of all human beings to an opportunity to live, work and enjoy. When we fully realize this we will no longer fear the trusts, for we will know that the greatest industrial or commercial combination is absolutely helpless unless public opinion is with it, and the men in its employ are the right kind of men. That the organizations recognize this truth, is proven by the lines along which they are proceeding and the tendency shown by many of them to admit trusted employees to a share in the business. The only necessity now is for the workman to recognize his own actual and
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possible value as fully as his employer recognizes it, and to show himself equal to the opportunity that, for the first time in the whole course of industry, is offered him. He must fight and fight hard for his rights, but his weapons must be efficiency, honesty and integrity, instead of violence and the desire to meet oppression with revolt. He may be merely a machine worker, but there is no reason why he should be the slave of his machine. Let him become the master of it and use it with brain and energy as the craftsmen of old used their hands, and in a very short time he will cease to be a mechanical convenience, to be used or dispensed with as the occasion may arise, and will become instead an efficient, self-respecting workman fully able to stand by his rights and to enforce their recognition, because he is a man that his employers will not willingly lose.

This is the day of the workingman, and the prosperity of the country cannot be otherwise than his prosperity if he will only grasp his opportunity and use it as he should. If he but does so, the process of readjustment will be wonderfully easy, and prosperity, instead of being at the mercy of a few capitalists who find it to their interest to create or dissolve gigantic combinations, will be a settled condition, because it will rest upon the broad and permanent basis of honesty, economy, efficiency and steady production.

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THE “Second Annual Exhibition of American Bronzes” opened at the Macbeth Galleries in New York on December ninth. Eighteen sculptors were represented, six of them women. It is interesting that this most intimate of the plastic arts should show so large a presentation of women’s work, and doubly interesting that the work should reveal so wide a variation in subject and technique. Nearly all of the younger school of men and women sculptors were represented, and a most significant individuality was felt throughout the exhibition. Chester Beach showed some fine imaginative pieces, “The Waterfall,” “The Wood Nymph,” “The Spray”—all expressing a certain wild fancy, exquisite grace of body swaying to poetic emotion—not quite creatures of the water and winds, but full of the beauty of and joy in nature. Miss Abastenia Eberle exhibited four figures of exceptional beauty, a “Bacchante” suggesting Miss Duncan’s dancing in its exquisiteness movement and vigor, a “Hurdy-Gurdy Dancer,” “A Portrait” and “Skipping Rope.” The latter a figure of a child, so full of joy and frolic and the exhilaration of youth that it is positively radiant with life. More and more one counts on Miss Eberle as one of the American sculptors who will develop the art of her own land with fearlessness and beauty. It was good to see so many of Mr. E. W. Deming’s bronzes together. For he, too, will be counted among the artists who have had the courage of their impulse and nationality. His animals are most convincingly, sensitively modeled and always faintly humorous, lovingly so, as this phase of art should be. His “Toiler of the Plain” is a strong symbolic figure, the history of one decade of our civilization, which destroyed as it grew. There is terrible pathos in the bent worn figure.

A surprise and a very real pleasure was the collection of Mrs. Clio Bracken’s work, a surprise because one does not often see this work, and a pleasure because of the delicately beautiful portrayal of the harmony of men and women with the great elemental condition of life, the sea and the wind, women and children all blend together into what she wishes to express of beauty as she sees it in all of life. A figure of exuberance, youth and rare grace is Mrs. Bracken’s “Basket Ball Player.” It is realism. It is the exact spring the vital young body would make for the overhead ball, and yet it is also poetical; the ideal beauty that such a movement could portray from finger tip to the elastic foot must have been in the mind of the artist. The lithe grace of the long sinuous lines brings one a taste of