THE LEAVEN OF OPTIMISM

By JAMES H. SKEWES

We, co-workers in a great democracy, have reason to be a hopeful people. Although still young, we are a world power, pregnant with such unbounded possibility that, to many, the future seems all sunshine. Yet to some there is so much evil in our life that the morrow looms dark and uncertain. There are two voices continually crying aloud: the dismal wail of the pessimism and the clarion call of optimism. The one, bounded by the grave, laments lack of opportunity; the other, freed by a vision of the Eternal, creates opportunity. In the treadmill of enervating despondency, pessimism makes a living; in the dynamo of stimulating inspiration, optimism makes a life.

The pessimist sees vice and crime and concludes that all virtue is dead. He sees strife between capital and labor and reasons that there is no good in our industrial system. He sees corruption in politics, and, declaring our government a failure, he throws away his ballot. Not content with conscientious criticism or just condemnation, the ranting pessimist poisons the crystalline fountain of youth. The pessimistic demagogue distorts right relations, paralyzes confidence, fills the masses with bitterness, and foments sedition. He impugns our highest motives, assassinates our noblest characters. The traces of this rabid pessimism darken our history. The Conway Cabal defamed the “Father of His Country;” caviling bigots vilified the framers of our constitution; the opponents of the Louisiana purchase maligned Thomas Jefferson. The last half century has suffered pessimistic riot, plunder, fire and murder in Pittsburgh, in Chicago, in Hocking Valley, in the mountains of Idaho. This frenzied pessimism aimed the bullet that made Lincoln a martyr. Yesterday it gave us Aaron Burr; today it gives us Emma Goldman. Yesterday it murdered President McKinley; today it strikes down Mayor Gaynor. Every ill the pessimist finds, he magnifies; the good he fails to see; and by creating an atmosphere of chill depression he congeals the well-spring of human progress.

How different the optimist! He recognizes ills, but sees a better state and strives to make his vision a reality. He glories in the triumphs of his age, and while deeply deploving undesirable conditions, finds buoyant joy in the struggle to rectify wrongs. This spirit sweetens his defeats, adds power to his efforts. It is the essence of his religion, the mainspring of his achievement—not the ignorant optimism which results in improvident content, but that spirit which is ever in pursuit of better things; not the supine optimism which fretfully turns away from the darker side, but that splendid enthusiasm which endeavors to solve human problems.

Glorious is the record blazoned by optimism upon the escutcheon of American history. Optimism plowed the unknown seas with Columbus. It inspired the Titanic courage which endured harrowing hardships and subdued the cruel savagery of the new continent. It scaled the heights of Quebec with Wolfe. Guided by it, our fathers welded thirteen quarreling colonies into a unified federation. It voiced the memorable sentiment, “Millions for defense, but not one cent for tribute.” It issued the Monroe Doctrine and triumphed in the battle for commercial rights. The frontiersman, nervèd by its hopefulness, braved the
dangers and privations of the primeval wilderness and gave us the great empire of the west. Yesterday it potentialized the lives of Hamilton, Jackson, Morse, McKinley; today it bears fruit in the efforts of Carnegie, Hill, Peary, Edison. Then it united the East and West with railways, rebuilt fire-swept Chicago, and enslaved the subtle forces of the earth; now it joins oceans with the Panama Canal, raises shattered San Francisco, and completes the mastery of the air.

How the golden thread of soul-born optimism runs through the magnificent tapestry of American liberty. Nobler than the brave hope which has given us such unparalleled material progress, is the sublime optimism which makes us leaders in the struggle for political, social and spiritual democracy. This optimism piloted the Mayflower across the stormy Atlantic. This was the "Spirit of Seventy-Six." This God-given faith enabled the dying martyr, Nathan Hale, to say, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." Optimistic vision led our people to pay gladly the price of civil war; and we emerged weary and battle-scarred, but triumphant—the clang of the shackles silenced forever—a reconsecrated nation. The "Boys in Grey"—defeated, their government gone, their homes wrecked, their lands devastated—rose from the thick fog of desolation to the sunlit vision of a higher, nobler, freer life; and a New South, grander by far than the old, stands an imperishable monument to their optimism. Through winters and summers, through seed times and harvests, has the sun of optimism illuminated our paths and inspired our hearts.

And this fervent optimism is heartening our life today. The same spirit which freed Cuba and sent millions to relieve Messina, now compels selfish employers and unscrupulous corporations to consider the welfare of our people. Corrupt politics, commercial machination, industrial avarice, are quaking before the force of optimistic endeavor. Employees' compensation, regulation of trade, conservation, referendum, popular rights, are living issues. Optimism, through the efforts of high minded, patriotic citizens, is leavening our civilization with higher ideals. Our governmental halls are graced by noble, progressive leaders. What calls from quiet retreats such men as Woodrow Wilson? It is the voice of the American people who have caught a vision, a compelling vision of a government in the interests of humanity.

A new humanism is coming to the front. Through optimism God has interposed in behalf of the millions. How fruitful are the lives of Doctor Flexner, Judge Lindsey, Booker Washington, Jane Addams! Our life is heartened by cheering activities: social centers, free hospitals, health associations, public playgrounds, university extension, peace conferences—how inspiring the list! How it might be prolonged! Equality and brotherhood are ideas throbbing with the heart-power of optimistic altruism.

But the mission of optimism is not fulfilled. We still have evils. Maladministration of law breeds contempt for government. Organized wealth is exploiting the people through special privilege and shrewd evasion or open violation of the statutes. We have oppression by capital and violent retaliation by labor. On one hand we have voluptuous riches, wanton luxury, shameless waste; on the other, poverty, wretchedness, starvation. In the lives of too many men, selfishness, moral flippancy, spiritual stagnation supplant the sterling virtues of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers. We spend annually, six times as much for intoxicants as for public schools—six times as much for a baneful luxury as for education. Though we have civil liberty, we lack equality of opportunity and privilege. The laboring classes seldom enjoy the higher products of our civilization. Science, literature, art, are not for the great mass of our people. While theoretically the colleges, universities and other institutions for the elevation of mankind are open to all, they are rarely available to the workingman or his children. Even the churches often fail
in their duty to the poor man. Too often, toiling from morning until night, refused the just earnings of his hands, exploited by the scheming and avaricious, bearing his burdens alone, the laboring man is denied the better things of life: no books, no music, no pictures, no refinement, no creative joy, no buoyant hope; only a dull monotony of unrequited toil.

Yes, the pessimist is right when he says we have abuses. But pessimism will never remedy them. How is wrong to be righted unless the public mind assert the disorder curable? Pessimism pronounces our ailment fatal. Who will follow a pessimistic leader? Search history for the pessimist who has led a great humanitarian movement; you search in vain. The pessimist has no hope, no lofty purpose, no high resolution, no productive energy; his is a creed of stagnation, his way the path of retrogression.

If we are to perfect the triumphs so well begun, the courage, faith and idealism of the past must strengthen us for the work of the present. Great problems are not solved in an hour, a year or a generation. But the mountains of tomorrow are not so steep when we have climbed the foothills of today. We must have faith, faith in our institutions, faith in our fellow men, faith in ourselves, faith in the ultimate triumph of Eternal Right. Hear our own most consummate optimist, the great Lincoln, speak: "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it." The optimism that availed at Valley Forge and sustained us at Bull Run, the optimism that founded Tuskegee and built Hull House, will suffice for the problems of the twentieth century—the optimism of history, the practical optimism that does things—the colossal hopefulness that results in infinite potency, infinite realization.

This optimism must animate every fibre of our social being. It must pervade our homes and cause little children to grow in reverence for our institutions. It must dominate our schools that the men and women of tomorrow may know and appreciate our possibilities. It must vitalize our churches and inspire men for the tasks of life. It must permeate our industrial system and cause employer and employee alike to realize their mutual interests. It must transmute the dross of our sordid commercial world into the refined gold of business honor. It must command enforcement of law by officials and it must impel respect for law by the masses. It must scourge corruption, special interest, and like abuses, from the temple of government.

This spirit must rule supreme in our personal lives. Optimism must guide our thoughts, rule our impulses, broaden our affections, ennoble our acts. It must dominate public opinion. Public sentiment was born to command, and its mandate is law. The pulse-beats of our nation are but the heart-throbs of the American commonality. You and I must cherish the sentiment which demands better things. Moreover, we must realize that we, our failures, our successes, are integral factors in the formation of our individual and national ideals. We, the commoners, must catch the vision and strive for the amelioration of mankind. The leaders of men may sometimes turn the tide of battle, but enduring success demands the steady and consistent advance of the rank and file. You and I must fill the finite with infinite significance; "Fit to the finite, man's infinity."

Standing upon the mount of optimism, we behold the promise of the future—a New America, our country as it is to be—a land of equal opportunity and privilege for all—a land of homes and schools and sturdy men. In that land, worth is more than wealth. Capital is humanized; labor is Christianized. No sweatshops sap vitality; no labor dwarfs the growing child. There, the spirit of brotherhood permeates the lives and actions of men. There, the human echoes the Divine. The church is what the Prince of Peace meant it to be; "Its arches, the clasped hands of human comrades." The orphan's cry is hushed; the widow's want is satisfied. We see a full-fraught race—indi-
vidual and society reconciled. Man strives, unfolds, ripens—and beyond, guilding, inspiring, leads God’s Pillar of Cloud by day and Pillar of Fire by night.

Optimism, the creed of progress, the spirit of achievement, the gospel of service! Today is better than yesterday. We can make tomorrow better than today. Optimism, with its power to strike the chords of the human heart to a harmony of high aspiration with fruitful endeavor, must prevail. Let us think it, preach it, teach it, live it. Live it in the home, the school, the church, the factory, the market place; live it in all our civic and social relationships. Let the world see the American people going forward, all in unison and under Divine approval, joyously working out the mission born in a manger twenty centuries ago, with Him who walked the shores of Galilee.

FARM MANAGEMENT
By J. C. Mc OWEll

One of the subjects recently taken up by the U. S. Department of Agriculture is known as Farm Management. This subject treats of the farm as a unit, and attempts to get at all classes of agricultural problems from the standpoint of the farmer. Farm management is taught in many of our agricultural colleges, and a practical course in this subject is now given in the Wisconsin Agricultural College.

A thorough knowledge of the subject of farm management should enable one to determine what operations on the farm are paying, and which ones are carried on at a loss. On account of the difference in soils, the great variations in weather conditions from year to year, and the wide range of prices over which the farmer has little control, it is a very difficult problem to determine the comparative merits of different systems of farming. While the results to be obtained in any given year from a particular type of farming cannot be determined exactly in advance, there is much to be gained by carefully studying the business of the farm from every viewpoint.

The skillful farmer manages his farm so as to get the most out of it, not only in dollars and cents but in every way. The most successful farmers are the ones who produce crops and live stock at a profit, who maintain the fertility of the soil, who provide their families with all the comforts of life, and who yet are able to give their children a good fundamental education. While the making of money may not be the chief aim in farming, it is necessary that the successful farmer should be a financial success. Otherwise he is continually handicapped when it comes to providing himself and family with the comforts and conveniences of life. The information which enables a man to make a success of his work is the highest kind of knowledge. The old style education that taught a person how to enjoy all the good and desirable things of this world, and that did not teach him how to earn the capital with which to purchase these things, is rapidly giving way to the more practical education, that not only cultivates a taste for the best of everything, but teaches us how to earn the money with which to buy them.

In almost every neighborhood we find farmers who are making money, and in almost every neighborhood there are farmers who are constantly running farther and farther behind. In