



The Simple Life

By CHARLES WAGNER

Translated from the French by Mary Louise Hendee

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CHAPTER VIII.
THE MERCENARY SPIRIT AND SIMPLICITY

WE have in passing touched upon a certain widespread prejudice which attributes to money a magic power. Having come so near enchanted ground, we will not retire in awe, but plant a firm foot here, persuaded of many truths that should be spoken. They are not new, but how they are forgotten!

I see no possible way of doing without money. The only thing that theorists or legislators who accuse it of all our ills have hitherto achieved has been to change its name or form. But they have never been able to dispense with a symbol representative of the commercial value of things. One might as well wish to do away with written language as to do away with money. Nevertheless this question of a circulating medium is very troublesome. It forms one of the chief elements of complication in our life. The economic difficulties amid which we still founder, social conventionalities and the entire organization of modern life have carried gold to a rank so eminent that it is not astonishing to find the imagination of man attributing to it a sort of royalty. And it is on this side that we shall attack the problem.

The term money has for appellation that of merchandise. If there were no merchandise there would be no money, but as long as there is merchandise there will be money, little matter under what form. The source of all the abuses which center around money lies in a lack of discrimination. People have confused under the term and idea of merchandise things which have no relation with one another. They have attempted to give a venal value to things which neither could have it nor ought to. The idea of purchase and sale has invaded ground where it may justly be considered an enemy and a usurper. It is reasonable that wheat, potatoes, wine, fabrics, should be bought and sold, and it is perfectly natural that a man's labor procure him rights to life and that there be put into his hands something whose value represents them, but here already the analogy ceases to be complete. A man's labor is not merchandise in the same sense as a sack of flour or a ton of coal. Into this labor enter elements which cannot be valued in money. In short, there are things which can in no wise be bought—sleep, for instance, knowledge of the future, talent. He who offers them for sale must be considered a fool or an impostor, and yet there are gentlemen who coin money by such traffic. They sell what does not belong to them, and their dupes pay fictitious values in veritable coin. So, too, there are dealers in pleasure, dealers in love, dealers in miracles, dealers in patriotism, and the title of merchant, so honorable when it represents a man selling that which is in truth a commodity of trade, becomes the worst of stigmas when there is question of the heart, of religion, of country.

Almost all men are agreed that to barter with one's sentiments, his honor, his cloth, his pen, or his note, is infamous. Unfortunately this idea, which suffers no contradiction as a theory and which thus stated seems rather a commonplace than a high moral truth, has infinite trouble to make its way in practice. Traffic has invaded the world. The money changers are established even in the sanctuary, and by sanctuary I do not mean religious things alone, but whatever mankind holds sacred and inviolable. It is not gold that complicates, corrupts and debases life; it is our mercenary spirit.

The mercenary spirit resolves everything into a single question. How much is that going to bring me? and sums up everything in a single axiom. With money you can procure anything. Following these two principles of conduct, a society may descend to a degree of infamy impossible to describe or to imagine.

How much is it going to bring me? This question, so legitimate while it concerns those precautions which each ought to take to assure his subsistence by his labor, becomes pernicious as soon as it passes its limits and dominates the whole life. This is so true that it vitiates even the toll which gains our daily bread. I furnish paid labor; nothing could be better. But if to inspire me in this labor I have only the desire to get the pay nothing could be worse. A man whose only motive for action is his wages does a bad piece of work. What interests him is not the doing, it's the gold. If he can retrench in pains without lessening his gains, he is assured that he will do it. Plowman, mason, factory laborer, he who loves not his work puts into it, neither interest nor dignity—is, in short, a bad workman. It is not well to confide one's life to a doctor who is wholly engrossed in his fees, for the spring of his action is the desire to garnish his purse with the contents of your purse. If it is for his interest that you should suffer longer, he is capable of fostering your malady instead of fortifying your strength. If his work only so far as it brings him profit is a sad teacher, for his pay is indifferent and his teaching more indifferent still. Of what value is the mercenary journalist? The day you write for the dol-

lar, your prose is not worth the dollar you write for. The more elevated in kind is the object of human labor, the more the mercenary spirit, if it be present, makes this labor void and corrupts it.

There are a thousand reasons to say that all toil merits its wage, that every man who devotes his energies to providing for his life should have his place in the sun and that he who does nothing useful—does not gain his livelihood, in short—is only a parasite. But there is no greater social error than to make gain the sole motive of action. The best we put into our work—be that work done by strength of muscle, warmth of heart or concentration of mind—is precisely that for which no one can pay us. Nothing better proves that man is not a machine than this fact: Two men at work with the same forces and the same movements produce totally different results. Where lies the cause of this phenomenon? In the divergence of their intentions. One has the mercenary spirit, the other has singleness of purpose. Both receive their pay, but the labor of the one is barren; the other has put his soul into his work. The work of the first is like a grain of sand, out of which nothing comes through all eternity; the other's work is like the living seed thrown into the ground. It germinates and brings forth harvests. This is the secret which explains why so many people have failed while employing the very processes by which others succeed. Automatons do not reproduce their kind, and mercenary labor yields no fruit.

Unquestionably we must bow before economic facts and recognize the difficulties of living. From day to day it becomes more imperative to combine well one's forces in order to succeed in feeding, clothing, housing and bringing up a family. He who does not rightly take account of these crying necessities, who makes no calculation, no provision for the future, is but a visionary or an incompetent and runs the risk of sooner or later asking alms from those at whose parsimony he has sneered. And yet what would become of us if these cares absorbed us entirely—if, mere accountants, we should wish to measure our effort by the money it brings, do nothing that does not end in a receipt, and consider as things worthless or pains lost whatever cannot be drawn up in figures on the pages of a ledger? Did our mothers look for pay in loving us and caring for us? What would become of filial piety if we asked it for loving and caring for our aged parents?

What does it cost you to speak the truth? Misunderstandings, sometimes sufferings and persecutions. To defend your country? Weariness, wounds and often death. To do good? Annoyance, ingratitude, even resentment. Self sacrifice enters into all the essential actions of humanity. I defy the closest calculators to maintain their position in the world without ever appealing to aught but their calculations. True, those who know how to make their "pile" are rated as men of ability. But look a little closer. How much of it do they owe to the usefulness of the simple hearted? Would they have succeeded had they met only shrewd men of their own sort, having for device, "No money, no service"? Let us be outspoken. It is due to certain people who do not count too rigorously that the world gets on. The most beautiful acts of service and the hardest tasks have generally little remuneration or none. Fortunately there are always men ready for unselfish deeds, and even for those paid only in suffering, though they cost gold, peace and even life. The part these men play is often painful and discouraging. Who of us has not heard recitals of experiences wherein the narrator regretted some past kindness he had done, some trouble he had taken, to have nothing but vexation in return? These confidences generally end thus: "It was folly to do the thing." Sometimes it is right to do, for it is always a mistake to cast pearls before swine. But how many lives there are whose sole acts of real beauty are these very ones of which the doers repent because of men's ingratitude! Our wish for humanity is that the number of these foolish deeds may go on increasing.

And now I arrive at the credo of the mercenary spirit. It is characterized by brevity. For the mercenary man the law and the prophets are contained in this one axiom: "With money you can get anything." From a surface view of our social life nothing seems more evident. "The sinews of war," "the shining mark," "the key that opens all doors," "king money"—it one gathered up all the sayings about the glory and power of gold he could make a litany longer than that which is chanted in honor of the Virgin. You must be without a penny, if only for a day or two, and try to live in this world of ours, to have any idea of the needs of him whose purse is empty.

I invite those who love contrasts and unforeseen situations to attempt to live without money three days and far from their friends and acquaintances—in short, far from the society in which they are somebody. They will gain more experience in forty-eight hours than in a year otherwise. Alas for some people! They have this experi-

ence thrust upon them, and when veritable ruin descends around their heads it is useless to remain in their own country, among the companions of their youth, their former colleagues, even those indebted to them. People affect to know them no longer. With what bitterness do they comment on the creed of money! With gold one may have what he will; without it, impossible to have anything. They become pariahs, lepers, whom every one shuns. Flies swarm round cadavers, men round gold. Take away the gold, nobody is there. Oh, it has caused tears to flow, this creed of gain—bitter tears, tears of blood, even from those very eyes which once adored the golden calf!

And, with it all, this creed is false, quite false. I shall not advance to the attack with hackneyed tales of the rich man astray in a desert who cannot get even a drop of water for his gold, or the decrepit millionaire who would give half he has to buy from a stalwart fellow without a cent his twenty years and his lusty health; no more shall I attempt to prove that one cannot buy happiness. So many people who have money and so many more who have not would smile at this truth as the hardest ridden of saws. But I shall appeal to the common experience of each of you, to make you put your finger on the clumsy lie hidden beneath an axiom that all the world goes about repeating.

Fill your purse to the best of your means and let us set out for one of the watering places of which there are so many—I mean some little town formerly unknown and full of simple folk, respectful and hospitable, among whom it was good to be, and cost little. Fame with her hundred trumpets has announced them to the world and shown them how they can profit from their situation, their climate, their personality. You start out on the faith of Dame Rumor, flattering yourself that with your money you are going to find a quiet place to rest and, far from the world of civilization and convention, weave a bit of poetry into the warp of your days.

The beginning is good. Nature's setting and some patriarchal costumes, slow to disappear, delight you. But as time passes the impression is spoiled. The reverse side of things begins to show. This which you thought was as true antique as family heirlooms is naught but trickery to mystify the credulous. Everything is labeled; all is for sale, from the earth to the inhabitants. These primitives have become the most consummate of sharpers. Given your money, they have resolved the problem of getting it with the least expense to themselves. On all sides are nets and traps, like spider webs, and the fly that this gentry lives snugly in wait for is you. This is what twenty or thirty years of venality has done for a population once simple and honest, whose contact was grateful indeed to men worn by city life. Homemade bread has disappeared, butter comes from the dealer, they know to an art how to skim milk and adulterate wine; they have all the vices of dwellers in cities without their virtues.

As you leave you count your money. So much is wanting that you make complaint. You are wrong. One never pays too dear for the conviction that there are things which money will not buy.

You have need in your house of an intelligent and competent servant. Attempt to find this rara avis. According to the principle that with money one may get anything, you ought, as the position you offer is inferior, ordinary, good or exceptional, to find servants unskilled, average, excellent, superior. But all those who present themselves for the vacant post are listed in the last category and are fortified with certificates to support their pretensions. It is true that nine times out of ten when put to the test these experts are found totally wanting. Then why did they engage themselves with you? They ought in truth to reply as does the cook in the comedy, who is dearly paid and proves to know nothing:

Why did you hire out as a cordon bleu? It was to get bigger commissions.

That is the great affair. You will always find people who like to get big wages. More rarely you find capability. And if you are looking for capability the difficulty increases. Mercenaries may be had for the asking; faithfulness is another thing. Far be it from me to deny the existence of faithful servants, at once intelligent and upright. But you will encounter as many, if not more, among the ill paid as among those most highly salaried. And it little matters where you find them, you may be sure that they are not faithful in their own interest; they are faithful because they have something of that simplicity which renders us capable of self abnegation.

We also hear on all sides the adage that money is the sinews of war. There is no question but that war costs much money, and we know something about it. Does this mean that in order to defend herself against her enemies and to honor her flag a country need only be rich? In olden time the Greeks took it upon themselves to teach the Persians the contrary, and this lesson will never cease to be repeated in history. With money ships, cannon, horses may be bought, but not so military genius, administrative wisdom, discipline, enthusiasm. Put millions into the hands of your recruiters and charge them to bring you a great leader and an army. You will find a hundred captains instead of one, and a thousand soldiers. But put them under fire; you will have enough of your hirelings! At least one might imagine that with money alone it is possible to lighten misery. Ah, that, too, is an illusion from which we must turn away. Money, be the sum great or small, is a seed which germinates into abuses. Unless there go with it intelligence, kindness, much knowledge of men, it

—Binks (as snow flies)—I'm afraid, Barnes, that the train you're waiting for will be badly delayed.

Barues—No, it won't. My mother-in-law on it.—Kansas City Star.

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 Condensed Time Table effective Nov. 23, 1904.

READ DOWN	Stations	READ UP
No. 1 No. 3	No. 6 No. 4 No. 2	
A. M. P. M. P. M. L. V.	A. M. P. M. P. M. A. M.	
7:10 8:40 10:10	7:20 8:50 10:20	
11:30 1:00 2:30	11:40 1:10 2:40	
3:10 4:40 6:10	3:20 4:50 6:20	
7:30 9:00 10:30	7:40 9:10 10:40	
11:50 1:20 2:50	12:00 1:30 3:00	
3:30 5:00 6:30	3:40 5:10 6:40	
7:50 9:20 10:50	8:00 9:30 11:00	
11:10 12:40 1:10	11:20 12:50 2:20	
2:40 4:10 5:40	2:50 4:20 5:50	
6:10 7:40 9:10	6:20 7:50 9:20	
9:40 11:10 11:40	9:50 11:20 11:50	
12:10 12:40 1:10	12:20 12:50 2:20	
2:40 4:10 5:40	2:50 4:20 5:50	
6:10 7:40 9:10	6:20 7:50 9:20	
9:40 11:10 11:40	9:50 11:20 11:50	
12:10 12:40 1:10	12:20 12:50 2:20	

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EASTWARD	Nov. 29th 1903	WESTWARD
M. P. M. A. M. L. V.	STATIONS	A. M. P. M. P. M.
6:00 7:30 9:00	Bellefonte	9:00 10:30 12:00
10:30 12:00 1:30	Lebanon	1:30 3:00 4:30
3:00 4:30 6:00	Shrewsbury	6:00 7:30 9:00
9:30 11:00 12:30	Lebanon	12:30 2:00 3:30
3:30 5:00 6:30	Shrewsbury	6:30 8:00 9:30
9:00 10:30 12:00	Bellefonte	12:00 1:30 3:00
3:00 4:30 6:00	Lebanon	6:00 7:30 9:00
9:30 11:00 12:30	Shrewsbury	12:30 2:00 3:30
3:30 5:00 6:30	Lebanon	6:30 8:00 9:30
9:00 10:30 12:00	Bellefonte	12:00 1:30 3:00

LEWISBURG & TYRONE RAILROAD.

EASTWARD	UPPER END	WESTWARD
M. P. M. A. M. L. V.	STATIONS	A. M. P. M. P. M.
6:00 7:30 9:00	Bellefonte	9:00 10:30 12:00
10:30 12:00 1:30	Lebanon	1:30 3:00 4:30
3:00 4:30 6:00	Shrewsbury	6:00 7:30 9:00
9:30 11:00 12:30	Lebanon	12:30 2:00 3:30
3:30 5:00 6:30	Shrewsbury	6:30 8:00 9:30
9:00 10:30 12:00	Bellefonte	12:00 1:30 3:00
3:00 4:30 6:00	Lebanon	6:00 7:30 9:00
9:30 11:00 12:30	Shrewsbury	12:30 2:00 3:30
3:30 5:00 6:30	Lebanon	6:30 8:00 9:30
9:00 10:30 12:00	Bellefonte	12:00 1:30 3:00

BELLEFONTE CENTRAL RAILROAD.
 Schedule to take effect Monday, Nov. 29th, 1903.

WESTWARD	read down	STATIONS	EASTWARD	read up
No. 5	No. 8	No. 1	No. 2	No. 4
A. M. P. M. A. M. L. V.	A. M. P. M. A. M. L. V.		A. M. P. M. A. M. L. V.	
6:00 7:30 9:00	6:10 7:40 9:10	Bellefonte	8:00 9:30 11:00	
10:30 12:00 1:30	10:40 12:10 1:40	Lebanon	1:30 3:00 4:30	
3:00 4:30 6:00	3:10 4:40 6:10	Shrewsbury	6:00 7:30 9:00	
9:30 11:00 12:30	9:40 11:10 12:40	Lebanon	12:30 2:00 3:30	
3:30 5:00 6:30	3:40 5:10 6:40	Shrewsbury	6:30 8:00 9:30	
9:00 10:30 12:00	9:10 10:40 12:10	Bellefonte	12:00 1:30 3:00	
3:00 4:30 6:00	3:10 4:40 6:10	Lebanon	6:00 7:30 9:00	
9:30 11:00 12:30	9:40 11:10 12:40	Shrewsbury	12:30 2:00 3:30	
3:30 5:00 6:30	3:40 5:10 6:40	Lebanon	6:30 8:00 9:30	
9:00 10:30 12:00	9:10 10:40 12:10	Bellefonte	12:00 1:30 3:00	

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