

ANDREW CARNEGIE

A CHARACTER SKETCH BY HAMILTON W. MABIE.¹

SOCIETY is fast becoming richer than was foreshadowed in the most audacious dreams of the past. Measured by the standards of to-day, Cræsus was a person of very moderate fortune; and the revenues of kings are of small account compared with the incomes of the leading capitalists of the twentieth century. There are those who think that the recent production of wealth is abnormal and who are predicting a return to the old scale of values in the near future. There are, however, no signs of any reduction of energy, any decline of force, any exhaustion either of the genius which creates wealth or of the material out of which wealth is developed. There are, on the contrary, many things which indicate that society is in the early stages of a wealth-producing period, the like of which has not only not occurred before, but has never been anticipated by the most sanguine men of affairs. Great changes will undoubtedly be made in the methods of distribution of wealth, but there will be no diminution in its production. Historic processes are now bearing the slow fruitage of time in the opening up of the entire globe, the drawing together of races in free competition in the field of the world, the discovery of the magical power of co-operation and combination and their application to commerce and trade on a great scale, and, above all, the application of science to business in all departments, from the uses of chemistry in manufacturing to the uses of electricity in swift communication and conveyance of goods.

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It is probable that the severest test to which society is to be subjected lies before it in the opulence of the near future, and there is good ground for the forebodings of those who fear that in the greatness of their material fortunes the spiritual fortunes of men will suffer permanent eclipse. The great races have been great by virtue not of possessions, but of ideas, convictions, and character; and in this respect it is not dogmatic to affirm that history will repeat itself.

The problem of the near future will be to keep the spirit in command of the body, the mind superior to the hand, the idea supreme above the material which gives it concrete expression. That problem will not be solved by any form of asceticism, by the preaching of poverty, by repression of the full and free play of human energy. Safety lies not in the mutilation of man as God made him, but in persuading him to accept a true scale of values, a real appraisal of his possessions. A complicated problem is never solved by going backward; it is solved by going forward. Society will not be saved by making it poor, but by making it strong. So long as the genius of man has such subtle powers of insight, discovery, and adaptation, and so long as the earth on which he lives supplies him so abundantly with force, material, and method, it is as idle to ask him to limit production as to invite him to commit suicide; he works, and he will work with an increasing skill, by the law of his nature, and he will grow rich by the law of the world in which he works. The only real question, therefore, is, What shall he do with his wealth?

This question is probably more fundamental than any political or economical question now in discussion, and Mr. Carnegie's answer to it has made him one of the foremost men of his time. It is significant that the emphasis of interest in Mr. Carnegie's case has shifted from his wealth to the uses he is making of it; from the material with which he works to the idea which he is expressing through it. He represents a new order of men in the world, and the instinctive feeling that a man's fortune is his private affair and that it betrays a lack of delicacy to speak of it has given place to a recognition of the public aspects of great fortunes when, by organization, they constitute the basis of a new group of forces in society. The great modern capitalist is not and cannot be a private person; he is, by virtue of his power and his responsibilities, as much and as legitimately

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a public man as the Czar of Russia, the Prime Minister of England, or the President of the United States. He is no longer simply an employer of labor: he is also the controller and manager of the vast accumulations which numberless private persons have intrusted to him. His property is the security of countless small investments; his integrity and capacity are elements in the well-being of the community.

When great capitalists began to appear there was a great deal of idle and, in many cases, of vulgar curiosity about their habits of life, their amusements and occupations. That kind of curiosity will always exist, and is now the chief stock in trade of cheap newspapers which denounce the rich in leaded editorials and surrender page after page to minute and impertinent accounts of the dress, food, amusements, and dissipation of the same class. Rational interest has shifted, however, from the making of fortunes to their use — from accumulation to distribution.

In the development of the phase of modern life which has produced the great capitalist, Mr. Carnegie has been a significant figure. He was one of the first in point of time to arrive at the position of a great man of wealth by modern standards; to acquire a fortune so vast that its possession gave him historical prominence. His success was the more dramatic because it was achieved by the use of so few tools at the start; it had no visible foundations of inherited capital, organization, or opportunity; it rested solely on the character and force of the man; on his insight into the possibilities of the means, the openings, and the men about him; on his courage, steadiness, power of combination, and sustained force of intellect.

The foundations of Mr. Carnegie's success were laid in his personality, and the work was done in large measure by his ancestors. He is often spoken of as the conspicuous example of the self-made man. If by self-made is meant the making of a powerful person in will, intelligence, and practical force with slight accidental aids from circumstances, Mr. Carnegie is self-made; but if the phrase carries with it the idea of complete organization of character and mind without contribution from others, Mr. Carnegie is not self-made. To the making of every powerful man many agencies contribute: ancestry, racial tendencies, general conditions, local opportunities. No man succeeds without help from others; no man becomes great in any

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field of endeavor by isolated growth; all development is aided by co-operation; every success is social in its conditions if not in its origin; and, therefore, every success ought to be interpreted in terms of social service. No man secures anything for himself in isolation, and no man has a moral right to enjoy in isolation the thing he secures.

Mr. Carnegie made his fortune by virtue of qualities in his own nature and with little aid from without; so far as outside help was concerned, he is a striking example of how much a man can accomplish with no tools except those which nature puts into his hands. In the new and greater stage of his career, Mr. Carnegie is now rendering his most distinctive service to the community by his interpretation of the uses and responsibilities of wealth. When the immense sums which he has given and will give for educational purposes in one form or another are added up and the total set down in figures, the imagination of the country will be impressed and its sense of obligation quickened; but in the long run it will probably appear that the greatest service rendered by Mr. Carnegie was not his vast beneficence, but his attitude toward his success, his recognition of the social element in great enterprises, his return in kind to the community which made his rise to affluence and power possible.

The real test of a man comes when the necessity for work is past and he is able to give himself to the things for which he cares. It has often happened that a man has arrived at fortune and ease only to disclose the emptiness of his soul, the poverty of his ideals. It is the way in which Mr. Carnegie has met this test which has made him so interesting a figure of late years, and has revealed, as his years of active business life could not reveal, the variety and range of his interests, the deep springs of youth and activity in his nature. For this endowment of imagination, vivacity, spiritual energy, he owes as much to his ancestry as for his sagacity, energy, and thrift. He comes of a race of extraordinary capacity for dealing with affairs and of extraordinary capacity for living by ideas—a race which not only strikes hard and works hard, but which puts the same force into emotional and moral life; combining in the same person the keenest shrewdness, the clearest judgment, and the capacity for absolute surrender to a great passion or a great cause. Scotland has been the home of “lost causes and impossible loyal-

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ties"; and Scotland has also been, taking into account her size and her population, a country of unique spiritual and intellectual influence; the home of thinkers, scholars, poets, romancers; with universities which are the organized opportunity of the poorest, and a poetry which is the possession of the humblest and the most unlearned.

The vast generosity of Mr. Carnegie to literature and scholarship—for the library is the storehouse of literature and the open door to scholarship—is not a matter of impulse and did not take its rise in suggestion from without. Love of poetry and learning came to him by inheritance. His youth knew the spell and the inspiration of Burns and Shakespeare and those noble old ballads in which the idealism, the passion, and the tragedy of Scottish life found such moving and dramatic expression. Self-made in his independence of material help, Mr. Carnegie was singularly fortunate in the ancestral influences which penetrated and enriched his nature far below the region of his practical activity and efficiency, that deeper part of him which has found expression in these later years, and has asserted its priority of spiritual importance over the executive side of his character.

This background of early life, becoming constantly more distinct in Mr. Carnegie's later career, must be taken into account in any attempt to explain the man, but can only be lightly touched here. In a Scottish home of the kind from which Mr. Carnegie came there are to be found not only the qualities which command success in affairs, but the higher qualities which weigh and measure success in terms of spiritual values. Among those vigorous, honorable, thrifty Scottish folk, with their keen native sagacity and their equally keen appreciation of learning, of poetry, of the finer things of the spirit, several figures may be recalled: a father endowed with the gift of imagination, poetic in temperament, eloquent in speech, passionately interested in all movements for the betterment of his kind;¹ a mother from the Highlands, with the Celtic sensibility and fire, an inexhaustible store of old ballads in her memory; an uncle who became a foster-father, and who has but recently gone to his rest, feeble with the weight of years but of an unbroken courage and that

¹ The father was one of three Dunfermline weavers who pooled their book possessions and thus instituted the first library in that town. The son has recently presented a handsome library building to this his native place, having already built a technical school and other municipal buildings there.

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sweetness which is the flower of a lifelong rectitude and a lifelong cherishing of the traditions, the songs, the spiritual impulses of a race whose labors and hardships have never lacked the illuminating touch of the imagination. This uncle, who loved liberty because it is the heritage of brave souls, in the dark days of the American Civil War stood almost alone in his community for the cause which Lincoln represented. He loved education with the passion of an ardent nature, eager to open the doors of opportunity, and his happiest hour came when Mr. Carnegie endowed a school for manual training in the Scottish town in which he lived and attached his name to it. His working hours knew the constant solace of poetry, and he taught the boys growing up about him the songs of Burns, the Scottish ballads, and the plays of Shakespeare as they learned their crafts. "I made myself a boy that they might be men," he once said, recalling the days, when, as they worked together, they impersonated the actors in the great stories of Scottish history and tradition. His eyes kindled when the old songs were sung, and his youth came back to him as, with undimmed memory and unspent feeling, he recited the lines which he carried in his heart. A beautiful figure, this old uncle, venerable and yet touched with the spirit which knows not age, in deep sympathy with the upward movement of the world, and one in heart with the struggle for larger opportunities everywhere. In the light of the memory of such an ancestry it is easy to understand why Mr. Carnegie has ceased to be an organizer of industry and has become an organizer of opportunity, and is now, on a scale unpractised before, transmuting fortune into knowledge, thought, freedom, and power.