

ARTICLE II.

THE SQUARE DEAL — OR THE OBLONG?

BY THE LATE WILLIAM I. FLETCHER.

[In sending this communication, a short time before his death (June 15, 1917), the distinguished and lamented author wrote, "Twenty years ago (January, 1897) you printed an article for me on 'The Master-Passion.' Ever since I have been mulling over a complementary article which I have at last written out, and I now enclose it with the wish that, if it is acceptable, it might appear with a note calling attention to its predecessor." It is needless to say that the two articles treat in a masterful way the most sensitive points in modern sociological speculation.—EDITOR.]

A MERCHANT of my acquaintance heads his advertisement in the local paper with the motto "On the Square" followed by his name enclosed in a rectangular figure which, however, is not square but oblong. My first thought on seeing this was that it might seem to hint that his dealings were not as broad as they were long, — rather a sinister meaning. But as I thought a little about the vaunted "square deal" I soon saw that it falls far short of the Christian, that is the fraternal, ideal, and that the oblong figure is a much truer type of dealings which conform to that ideal, that is, of dealings in which one gives, or tries to give, more than he gets. Since Jesus, the great discoverer in morals, called attention to the unquestionable fact that "it is more blessed to give than to receive," the men of good will in all pursuits have sought that blessedness, and have been not quite satis-

fied with their part in any transaction in which the element of giving did not exceed that of receiving. And it is quite true, though it sounds paradoxical, that in every truly honest trade or dealing both parties are gainers.

All human industry, trade, or business is merely the collecting, preparing, and distributing of the products of the earth, that is of the gifts of God with which the earth is stored; every addition to the wealth of men or of nations is drawn ultimately from that great storehouse. "God giveth the increase" in the sense that man can really add nothing to the resources available to mankind; his part it is to share in God's work, and by various processes of separating and combining and working over, to add values for human use to the raw products of the earth; nothing is more glaringly false than the statement often made that what one gains another loses.

All gains from business must, in the last analysis, be regarded as wages for service rendered to the community, although the man in business generally fixes the rate at which he shall be paid and collects his pay from the business as it passes through his hands, much as the old-time miller took his toll from each bag of grain. It is right here that the business man meets his temptation. Horace Greeley is quoted as having said, "It is the darkest day in a young man's life when he first thinks of getting a dollar for which he does not render an equivalent." We must go farther and say that to have the sense of walking in the light one must feel that he renders at least a little more than an equivalent for what he gets; so only is he conscious of being something more than an "unprofitable servant": so only may he rejoice in being a coworker with God in His great work of blessing and uplifting the human family.

It is common for critics of existing conditions and methods in business to allege that their underlying principle is selfishness. Professor Walter Rauschenbusch, for example, in his admirable book, "Christianizing the Social Order," says:—

"Business is the unregenerate section of our social order. If by some magic it could be plucked out of our total social life in all its raw selfishness, and isolated on an island, unmitigated by any other factor of our life, that island would immediately become the object of a great foreign mission crusade for all Christendom. . . . Our first need is to analyze our economic system so that we may understand wherein and why it is fundamentally unchristian" (pp. 156-157).

If this were true in this twentieth century of the Christian era we might well despair of the coming of the Kingdom. But while it is easy to find a mass of evidence that selfishness governs in large sections of the business world we cannot admit that it is regnant throughout. Of course business must be so conducted as to yield a profit or it cannot be carried on; this is only saying that "the laborer is worthy of his hire." But to say that my fellow men, including some of my relatives and many esteemed friends, who are in business, are in it only for what they can get out of it seems to me like a slander of them which I must resent. I know that it is true of many of them, and I believe it is of most, that they see in their business an agency for advancing the common weal, and that their primary interest in it is to see it succeed as such an agency.

Rauschenbusch alleges that certain departments of the social order have been Christianized, among them the family, the school, the church, even politics (in a measure), basing the assertion on the fact that in these departments of life the workers are prompted by regard for their fellow men, so that for one of them to be seeking merely or mainly his own profit

or advancement is a monstrosity, as, for example, when a politician is confessedly in politics for gain. The sensitiveness of the public conscience with regard to these matters is evidence indeed of the general application of high standards of conduct; no newspaper is so "yellow" as to condone breaches of trust committed by men in any walk of life, and it is generally recognized that all business is essentially trusteeship.

It were indeed a strange view of things that would credit men engaged in the professions or in public life with devotion to the common weal, and include all business, industry, and trade in a sweeping denunciation as devoid of such a motive. Properly looked at, all forms of enterprise and business are parts of that great undertaking in which preacher, teacher, statesman, author, business man, farmer, laborer, are all engaged, satisfying the needs and advancing the welfare of mankind. In every department of effort, even in the highest, there are doubtless many who look at their work selfishly, regarding it as merely a means of money getting, or at best of providing for those dependent on them. It may be said in passing that the loving devotion of many workers in all lines of effort to the welfare of wife and children reacts on the work itself, elevating it to something like a sacrament. But after all the family is a sort of enlarged self, and to provide for wife and children is not quite the highest of virtues, is certainly not an excuse for aberrations of conduct toward others.

The Christian, that is to say the only truly human, and humane, view of business transactions of all kinds is that no decent man will be content unless his contribution to the common good is worth a little more than the return he receives. Man is by nature and instinct a creator, a coworker with God

in making the world richer and fuller. The principle of the "square deal" would seem to be simply to leave things as they are, none the worse for one's deeds, but also none the better. To be content with such a negative and barren result of one's efforts is to abrogate the chief, the divinest function and prerogative of man. To have one's heart set on being of service to one's fellows, collectively or individually, is to obey the injunction "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"; for there can be no greater mistake than to understand these words as an injunction to have a certain feeling or emotion towards others. "Love cannot be commanded," my feelings are not under my control, is the natural and sufficient excuse for not obeying the command so understood. The whole trend of the Bible goes to show that the command to love refers to deeds, not to sentiments; act toward your fellow men as if you loved them is everywhere its equivalent. The good Samaritan "had compassion" (the instinctive reaction of the unspoiled human heart to suffering; witness its outgoing to the lost child or the victim of an accident on the city street), but the emphasis in the story is on the very practical aid he rendered.

The present purpose is to set up, and if possible vindicate, the claim that, in every human transaction of whatever character, the principle of the "oblong deal" should prevail. It is often alleged that modern industrialism and the prevalence of the corporate method make practically impossible the application of any ideal ethical principle to business transactions. Most writers on these subjects come to the conclusion that to correct the evils of our present order of things by legal and legislative processes is hopeless, and that the way out must be through the "conversion" of individual men from selfishness to good will, insuring that when men work

through combination into companies and corporations they will not tolerate measures that are repugnant to a good conscience. But there seems to be no reason why both the legislative method of attack, and the approach through the individual conscience, should not be employed coincidentally, as indeed they are at present being employed as never before; but the progress that has been made in these late years, great as it is, is slow enough to discourage those who would like to see Rome built in a day. But if the churches, the educators, the journalists, all whose mission it is to hold up ideals of character and conduct, would get well beyond mere "ethics," mere "moral" principles, and grasp the essential principle involved in the great saying "Love is the fulfilling of the law," we should find ourselves in a new era, singularly like the much-talked-of-millennium. In that era all conduct will be expected to be of an heroic or romantic type, such as we now see exemplified in the passengers and crew on a sinking ship or the occupants of a burning building; under such circumstances humanity recoils by a true instinct from the cry "Each for himself, and de'il tak' the hindmost," and regards self-sacrificing efforts to save others as the only conduct worthy of a human being in such a case; a short shrift is given to the soldier who is caught attempting to shield himself behind a comrade, and bitter denunciations follow the man who defrauds his own kin or his trusting associates.

Now it is perfectly clear that Jesus undertook no less a task than to bring in an era of good will in which all human transactions should be charged with this element of self-sacrifice; at the same time he said, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; full measure, pressed down and running over, shall men give into your bosom." After all is said that can be about this cold unfeeling world, these words of Jesus

have always proved true when ventured on, the world, the whole system of things under which we live, showing itself so constituted as to justify the saying, "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened."

The one condition on which the responsiveness of the world is based is good will, unselfishness. "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures." Against the self-centered life are arrayed all the forces of the universe, "the stars in their courses," but "all things work together for good" to the man who casts in his lot with God and His world; "and he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water . . . and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." The much-used phrase "the struggle for existence" has no fit application to human life if thought of as meaning a strife between men in which one seeks his own advantage at the expense of another; that is, a "scramble" for the good things of life. Man is called on to struggle against evils of many sorts and formidable enough to give him a hard tussle for himself and for the brother at his side; if he assumes an attitude of hostility toward any of his brothers he becomes a traitor to the cause of human fellowship and brotherhood.

Must it be said, as it is often said, that mankind is not ready for such elevated notions of human relations? If so, it is indeed a sad record for twenty centuries of Christianity, but may it not be that this twentieth century is preparing for such a long step forward as will eclipse all previous records? If all human relations are to be Christianized in this sense, international relations must be included, in spite of the currency of beliefs that nations must be selfish at least in their economic dealings with one another. These ideas, prevailing

as they have in "Christian Europe," show results that should make these nations ready to try another philosophy, and it is to be devoutly wished that when they get together at the close of this terrible war, they will be inspired to devise means of applying the law of love as a basis for the international law of the future. The United States has done much to blaze the way for progress in this direction by its efforts in China and Japan, in Cuba and the Philippines, in Mexico and South America. To the cynically disposed there is plenty of material for censure in the half-hearted way in which we have undertaken the task of the big brother in some of these countries; at the same time we have certainly made evident that the altruistic spirit may be shown in the affairs of nations.

A new definition of patriotism is needed for the new era. A genuine love of country does not mean anything antagonistic to any other countries; any more than one's love of his family signifies ill-will toward his neighbors; in fact, it is true that from a home suffused by a deep family affection there radiates an influence powerful to bless all that are within its reach. So a nation blest with high ideals of virtue and honor will be eager to share those ideals with other nations who may be less favored; and the fact of any nation's being behind in the race will be reason enough why the more favored countries shall lend a helping hand. The thought of what would ensue if international strifes and jealousies should give place to universal good-will is almost overwhelming, but need not be rejected as dreamy and impractical. Unless the congress of nations assembled at the close of this war to establish peace on a sure foundation shall plow as deep as this, the effort might as well be abandoned and the fighting be resumed and continued indefinitely.

To sum up, all human relations, in business, in politics, in

statesmanship, can and must be brought under the rule of Christ, which must be accepted as the normal, truly reasonable law of life, grounded in the nature of things and resting on no authority, on no one's *ipse dixit*, but commending itself to every man's conscience and borne out by the experience of the race. For all problems, individual or social, local or world-wide, economic or religious, love is the "universal solvent."