

INDIVIDUALISM IS AS DEAD AS A SMELT

George W. Perkins,
Chairman of the New
York City Committee
on Food Supply, Finds
That Science and In-
vention Are Forcing
Revolutionary
Changes in the
World's Industrial Re-
lations, Whether We
Like It or Not.

AT A RECENT public hearing on certain proposed food legislation which Mr. Perkins favored and which recognized the necessity of co-operation some one remarked that the legislation was a violation of the principle of individualism.

Mr. Perkins retorted, "Individualism is as dead as a smelt."

Mr. Perkins' reasons for his belief are outlined in the following article:—

By GEORGE W. PERKINS,

Chairman of Mayor Mitchell's Food Supply Committee.

One of the greatest stumbling blocks to progress is the human inclination to follow precedent and old methods too



GEORGE W. PERKINS.

closely. We find it difficult to strike out along entirely new lines.

Thomas Jefferson, in his old age, wrote a letter in which he said:—

Some men ascribe to the men of the preceding age a wisdom more than human, and suppose what they did to be beyond amendment. I knew that age [of the Revolution] well. I belonged to it and labored with it. It deserved well of its country. It was very like the present, but without the experience of the present; and forty years of experience is worth a century of book reading; and this they would say themselves were they to arise from the dead.

Great Changes Taking Place Rapidly.

The changes that occurred from the close of the Revolutionary War to Jefferson's old age made a deep impression on his mind; yet as we look back at them from this distance they seem infinitesimal when compared with the changes that have taken place in the world the last quarter of a century and the tremendous changes taking place now.

George Washington was a representative of the best type of American a century and a half ago. He was a scholar, a soldier and a statesman, yet he did not know as much about science as a young schoolboy of to-day.

Thomas A. Edison typifies the scientist of our time, but the gap between the man of the Edison type and Washington is probably greater than the gap between Washington and the man whose bones were recently discovered near Trenton, N. J., said to have lived 125,000 years ago.

The advances in science, intercommunication and in universal educa-



tion—these three great factors account for the stupendous progress this country has made in the last twenty-five years.

They have swept away old precedents, old customs, and they will eventually sweep away many of the laws now on our statute books.

The man of to-day who does not fully comprehend all this is doomed to be somewhat of a failure, while the man who does comprehend it will have taken a long stride toward success.

It is not many years since I was a lad, and yet at that time there was no such thing as a telephone. The telegraph was in very meagre use; fast express trains did not exist. It took several weeks to cross the ocean, and the only flying machine we knew about was the much derided one possessed by Darius Green.

Entering a New World.

When Abraham Lincoln was President it took four days or more for a letter to travel from his home in Illinois to New York. It took him several days to go from his home to Washington to be inaugurated. And yet only a few weeks ago a young woman, unaided and alone, travelled in a flying machine from Chicago to New York in eight hours and fifty minutes.

We are just entering a new electrical world, where everything is done, as it were, on the instant.

Our fathers had none of the modern machinery with which social and business intercourse is now carried on. Their sons are wrestling with the problem of how to use these new methods of intercommunication and still adhere to the laws, the precedents and the book learning of their fathers.

This is OUR great problem. It is a difficult, complicated problem and is causing a struggle of titanic proportions—a struggle to throw off in a night, as it were, the precedents of an old world for the realities of a new.

Precedent makes cowards of us all. But the educator, the scientist and the inventor have left us no choice. We must adjust our thought and action to new conditions.

The Day of Individualism Gone.

The changes of the last twenty-five years socially, industrially and economically have been great, yet I believe they are infinitesimal compared to the changes that are coming.

I believe these changes are going to deal most largely with the relationship of man to man.

In this country we have been living in an age of the utmost freedom to the individual. It has been the individualistic period, when the order of the day has seemed to be "every fellow for himself and the devil take the hindmost."

We have gloried in the freedom of the individual and have practised this freedom to a point where, in many phases of our life, it has amounted to license to do almost anything that we pleased or that brought profit or fancied renown, regardless of its effect on one's fellowmen.

In the early days, when instantaneous intercommunication did not exist, when education was meagre and science undeveloped, what the individual did was of comparatively small consequence, for his deeds did not reach very far and did not affect many people.

"I DO
AS I
LIKE."

—Individualism.

With intercommunication drawing the world together in one centralized

community, the act of the individual can affect a large number of people; therefore, that form of freedom which is simply another expression for license to do as one pleases can no longer exist.

When Manhattan was sparsely settled and most of the people lived on its southern end it would not have mattered much had there been a case of smallpox at the north end. The patient could have done pretty much as he pleased without endangering any one else.

But a case of smallpox in the northern end of Manhattan to-day must be quarantined immediately to protect other people.

When I was a boy there was no Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and had any one suggested that a man could not whip his horse as much as he pleased he would have been ridiculed. Indeed, in those days the idea that a man had not the right to beat his own child as he pleased was given little attention.

When we were all driving horses and buggies there was no speed limit and a man did not have to procure a license to drive a horse. With the advent of the automobile a license has become a necessity. The public must know that the man who operates an automobile knows first how to operate it and, second, to control it.

Society is finding it necessary to take away much of what has hitherto been called "freedom of the individual." In my judgment this process is only in its infancy.

Relation of Capital and Labor.

The freedom of the business man to do as he pleases is now being seriously challenged, and I most heartily agree with what Mr. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., said recently at Cornell University to the effect that one of the chief qualifications for a manager of a large business concern is rapidly coming to be the human quality and ability to adjust differences between capitalist and laborer and to understand their relationship.

Until recent years little broad thinking was given to this problem and differences were settled on the basis of "might makes right." All this is rapidly changing and we are entering a period of new industrial relationships.

In the long ago the relationship between capital and labor was that of owner and slave, then came the period of master and man, then the period of employer and employe, each period being a decided step forward.

In my judgment we are just now entering a period of copartnership, where the tool user will be part tool owner and where capital and labor will share more equitably in the profits of the business in which they are jointly engaged.

This advance is inevitable because of our educational system, which teaches the workingman to think for himself.

It is inevitable because intercommunication has told the workingman in one community what the workingman in other communities are striving for and achieving.