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Edited by D. W. Harding, L. C. Knights, F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson

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SCRUTINY

A Quarterly Review

Edited by

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THE ROBBER BARONS

- A. *THE LIFE OF ANDREW CARNEGIE*, by *Burton J. Hendrick*, 1933.
- B. *MELLON'S MILLIONS*, by *Harvey O'Connor* (*The John Day Co.*), 1933.
- C. *GOD'S GOLD, the story of Rockefeller and his times*, by *John T. Flynn*, 1933.
- D. *THIS UGLY CIVILISATION*, by *Ralph Borsodi* (*Harpers*).
- E. *THE LORDS OF CREATION*, by *F. L. Allen*, 1935.

Carnegie was born in 1835 at Dunfermline, then a prosperous town of handweavers. The works of Cobbett were the family mentor; Carnegie's beliefs were pacifist and radical. Other relatives had gone to farm in Alleghany, Pennsylvania, and following them his family emigrated to America, where the young Carnegie was thrilled by machinery and its achievements. He was in succession bobbin boy, telegraph messenger, assistant railroad superintendent, bridge builder, steel maker, organizer of industry, and millionaire. (B) mentions that Carnegie the pacifist was charged by H. C. Frick with profiteering in the Spanish war: (A) is silent on this point, and also on the assertion of (B) that Carnegie made his first large profits out of the civil war.

Frequently he visited Scotland. He formed friendships with Matthew Arnold, Gladstone and John Morley. He financed respectable English radicals. He wrote a book, *Triumphant Democracy*, a panegyric of progress and American civilization. He was devoted to his mother and after her death preserved her rooms untouched. He married at fifty-one. In 1881 Carnegie enlisted H. C. Frick, who had no use for unions, and to whom labour was a commodity merely. For information about Frick and his background we must digress to (B).

'That year 1886 Frick gave his friend [Mellon] a lesson in labour relations. Noxious gases from his thousand ovens laid waste the lovely countryside of Fayette county. By day they fumed and by night they flared. The natives left. Frick imported Hungarians and South Slavs. His agents pushed into Southeastern Europe, luring hopeful peasants to the promised land with wage offers that seemed fantastic when translated into Old Country currencies.

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' The newcomers found themselves herded into drab, smoke-smudged company houses, whose huddles of clapboard shacks were checkered by muddy lanes, served by mediæval sanitary devices and a few common wells. The tightlipped presbyters of Pittsburgh believed the " Huns " were made of some inferior clay which thrived on the volatile gases given off by baking coal.

' Periodically the serfs rebelled against wages which proved small enough when measured against American prices, against the feudalism which insisted that they trade only at Frick stores in Frick scrip, against the Frick police which maintained a private brand of law and order. In 1880 the rising lord of the coke regions beat down a strike of his freshly imported workers with little trouble, but . . . they rebelled again on a rising market which left their wages stationary.' Strikes and unions were beaten down with starvation.

(A) excuses Frick :

' He had been unfortunate in the type of workman with whom he had previously dealt. The Hungarians, Slavs, and Southern Europeans of Connellsville were a savage and undisciplined horde, with whom strong-arm methods seemed at times indispensable, and when strikes broke out murder and arson became their favourite persuasions.'

But Carnegie had always dealt with the unions, disliking violence, and had tended to give way to strikes. Frick thought this weak. In 1890 after Carnegie had surrendered to two strikes of his cokemen, they presented a new ultimatum, and he left the situation in Frick's hands. As (A) puts it, ' the resulting chapter was a fierce one ; there were shootings, dynamitings, fire and murder ; the sheriff this time did his duty ; the Huns and Slavs were held at bay ; and Frick emerged a winner.' Again on the occasion of the Homestead Strike in 1892, Frick looked after Carnegie's interests while he was away in England ; the strikers occupied the works, and after the ' Pinkerton ' guards had tried to get them out, a pitched battle followed. And according to (C), ' When Henry C. Frick shocked the country by shooting down ruthlessly the striking ironworkers at Homestead, John D. Rockefeller wrote him a letter approving his course and expressing sympathy.'

To return to Carnegie. When war broke out in 1914, he approved. (His friend Morley resigned from the cabinet). He

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founded various trusts for the distribution of his wealth, and became the laird of Skibo—' a castle with mediæval battlements, Pittsburgh steel girders, Westinghouse dynamos,' etc., etc. He had in 1868 written a paper envisaging his retirement at 35, and the distribution of his fortune. ' " The amassing of wealth," he had written, " is one of the worst species of idolatry, no idol more debasing. To continue much longer overwhelmed by business cares and with most of my thoughts wholly upon the way to make more money in the shortest time, must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery." He had continued, it is true, to amass wealth, contenting himself, as time went on, with taking six months of vacation each year, and thereby escaping in some measure the degradation which he feared . . . ' (*The Lords Of Creation*). Later he enounced the Gospel of Wealth—' the surplus wealth of the few should be the property of the many . . . spent for public purposes, not scattered in trifling amounts . . . ' This provoked a Methodist, the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, to denounce millionaires as a useless growth in a false economic world. ' If a man is so unfortunate as to have surplus wealth, he cannot do better than to act upon Mr. Carnegie's principles . . . But when I contemplate him as the representative of a particular class of millionaire, I am free to say . . . without holding him in the least responsible for his unfortunate circumstances, that he is an anti-Christian phenomenon, a social monstrosity, and a grave political peril . . . In a really Christian world—that is to say, in a community constructed on a Christian basis—a millionaire would be an economic impossibility.'

The book about Carnegie is the official life, long and dull. *Mellon's Millions* is a far more interesting book. Carnegie was the Industrious Apprentice, who piled up a fortune by himself. The Mellon wealth, on the other hand, was a family affair, founded by Judge Thomas Mellon, a Pittsburgh lawyer. The book is in the main about Andrew Mellon—the one who learnt to manage workmen from Frick. His masterpiece was not only to exploit the discovery of aluminium, but also to engineer a world-wide monopoly in it, which no law or injunction could shake. An instance of his power was the passing of a special law to enable his divorce case to be heard privately ; and when Mr. O'Connor tried to inspect the court records giving Mrs. Mellon's reply to her

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husband's charges, he found that the record had been removed. She said her first great disillusionment came 'when I learned that his people were not his people at all. I had dreamed of another Hertfordshire . . . I arrived in a strange land with strange people, strangers in a strange land. "They are foreign, Huns and Slavs, and such as that, and you can't do anything with them," I was told about the people whose affection I had dreamed of winning for my children. It was not only men. There were not only men. There were women and children, too, all toilers in my husband's vineyard; but none of them given the labourer's recognition, toiling and working on the estate and adding to its wealth but not recognized as part of it. The whole community spirit was hard and cold as the steel it made, and it chilled the heart to the core,' etc.

There is an enlightening chapter *Petroleum Diplomacy* on the exploitation of Mexico and Venezuela, and the following chapter supplies much matter for a history of commercial imperialism, especially on conditions in the bauxite mines of British Guiana, whence came much of the raw material for making aluminium. Of Mellon himself Mr. O'Connor writes:

'Andrew Mellon did not stoop to the dusty, often bloody arena of labor management. He maintained an Olympian aloofness from the miner wielding his pick and shovel or the furnace man sweltering in the infernal heat of his aluminium "hot-rooms."

'Mellon could find no fault with the almost universal twelve-hour day in his industries. Union Steel under Mellon sway operated night and day on the two-shift system. So did Aluminium as late as 1929 in New Kensington.

'The twelve-hour day kept the myriads of "hunkies" who toiled in Mellon mills out of brawls and brothels, his managers contended. The miserable Alleghany and Monongahela river towns where they worked offered scant recreation. The squalid, filthy dwelling places proved that the foreigners did not appreciate anything better, visitors were told. Miners' housing was on a level with that of Southern slaves, Judge Mellon himself had remarked.'

The war provided a convenient excuse for jailing radicals and agitators as German spies, the Mellon corporations were turned into a vast voting machine, and the family assets rose from 1,690,000,000 dollars in 1920 to 6,091,000,000 dollars in 1928. In

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1929 came the slump, and Mellon's policy as Secretary of the Treasury was blamed with contributing to it. He was exiled as ambassador to the Court of St. James.

Mr. O'Connor's is a very well documented and absorbing book. The career of a singularly uninviting person is presented with sufficient objectivity and without comment. Mellon appears as a bloodless automaton. When America or England has a Communist régime, this life will provide excellent matter for a propagandist film. The capitalist will not require the kind of blackening noticeable in some Soviet films. Brutal and inhuman as some millionaires may appear, excuses may be made. The tyrants of history and the bullies common in every age exercise their cruelty directly upon their victims. But it is possible for the millionaire type to be oblivious and even ignorant of the suffering they cause; merely obtuse, they need not be particularly cruel. The damage done in the exploitation of labour, in speculation and in swindling is usually remote from its authors. The operation is anonymous and impersonal. As Mr. Allen notes, in dealing with the formation of corporations, 'The general process of concentration made for irresponsibility of management, because again and again the power which men wielded far outreached their personal stake in the enterprises which they controlled.'

Rockefeller was born in 1839, and at the age of eighteen went into partnership as a produce merchant. Thus he secured sufficient capital to start exploiting the inventions of others, and by the age of thirty-nine the entire oil industry of America was in his hands—both the producing and refining sides. Mr. Flynn's account of the discovery of oil in quantity and the struggle to exploit it is the best I have read. (The book is extremely well documented throughout). The details of Rockefeller's success are not of interest at the moment; the methods were similar to Mellon's—the turning of employees into a voting machine, the use for propaganda of ostensibly disinterested organizations (the press, research laboratories), trusts, secret agreements, diabolically ingenious methods of crushing competitors, and a cynical disregard of all anti-trust and other legislation carried to check the machinations of capitalist monopoly.

According to Mr. Flynn, the blameless hero of (A) compares ill with Rockefeller; for Carnegie was hard, ruthless, and guilty

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of far more serious breaches of established ethics. Perhaps because Rockefeller at first neglected the art of ballyhoo, he was for a time the object of universal vituperation as the type of capitalist ogre. Later he learned the value of the press and under the direction of Ivy Lee, the headlines and titles of magazine articles changed from 'Rockefeller Indicted Again,' 'Tainted Money,' 'The Church and the Reward of Iniquity' to 'John D. Gives Dimes to Children,' 'Rockefeller Founder fights Pellagra in Georgia,' 'When I Caddied for John D.' and so on. He founded various charitable trusts which by 1932 had dispersed 750,000,000 dollars; and as in the case of other benefactors of humanity his concerns were involved in bloody strikes, on the scale almost of civil war.

We are familiar with essays describing the effects of machine technique and economy upon the worker, salesman, etc.—lack of opportunity for initiative, the exclusion of normal human qualities and interests, and so on. The effect upon the executives and captains of industry deserves a chapter towards the writing of which such biographies as these would contribute. We would like to know what kind of person gets to the top, and how fitted they are to control the lives of others. The likenesses between Carnegie and Rockefeller in particular suggest that millionaires run very much to type, the requisites for success being, besides luck, cunning nearly animal, smartness, opportunism, ant-like concentration on immediate ends, insensitiveness, ruthlessness, idealism, sanctioned if possible by one of the narrow forms of protestant religion. Mr. Allen records that 'One of the most striking things about this group of men [the elder Morgan, the Rockefeller brothers, and others] was their piety. At least seven of them were churchgoers; six were actively interested in church affairs.' (Cf. also the section of Mr. Borsodi's book on John D. Rockefeller as the quantity-minded type). They need luck because the raw material of millionaires seems common enough; there is nothing very special about them, unless it be the strength of their appetites. There is no ground for supposing that they are especially villainous or even clever—once they have made fortunes they often have no idea what to do with them, and their lives turn out to be as circumscribed almost as those of their workers. We learn from his biographer that Carnegie 'devoted himself with immense concentration to the job of the moment. He was never a hard

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worker in the grindstone sense . . . he was the thinker, the one who supplied ideas, inspiration, and driving power.' (Though Carnegie's laziness was exceptional: he enjoyed 'those extensive leisure periods of his which are so seldom mentioned by the exponents of hard work').

To Rockefeller is attributed 'relentless, ruthless patience.' 'He refused to enter upon operations where he could not see the project all the way through. But having satisfied his mind and gone in he hesitated at no sacrifice, no cost, no measures, however vast and even cruel, to drive through to his objective.' In Mrs. Millin's *Rhodes* and in various biographies of Ivar Kreuger one finds similar characteristics.

Mr. Flynn has some interesting comments to make upon the relation of business and religion. He disputes the view that the business heads to whom religion has been profitable are always hypocritical about it: 'The business man's religion is not the offspring of his business interests. It is the other way round. His business instincts are the children of his religion. The religious boy is the father of the business man.' The undesirable effects of religion upon business he explains by the devotion of the modern Christian to the Old Testament with its questionable ethics and heroes. Mr. Allen too points out that the Christian religion as practised by such men was only partially the religion of Jesus. 'Other philosophies than that of Christ had absorbed and diluted the Christian teachings. There was the Benjamin Franklin philosophy of frugality. There was the Puritan philosophy of sobriety, continence, and Sabbath observance. There was the *laissez-faire* tradition of business competition as a hard-fought battle without fear or favor.' Thus the business man finds sanction for his practices. Some support for these views is given by Professor Tawney in his *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*.

Though the 'capitalist spirit' is, as he says, as old as history, and not the offspring of Puritanism, 'it found in certain aspects of later Puritanism a tonic which braced its energies and fortified its already vigorous temper.' In the eyes of the Puritan moralist, work is 'not merely an economic means, to be laid aside when physical needs have been satisfied. It is a spiritual end, for in it alone can the soul find health, and it must be continued as an ethical duty long after it has ceased to be a material necessity.'

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Millionaires flourish in a world which has substituted acquisition for the saving of one's soul as the end of life.

Apart from a certain priggishness, the young Carnegie seems to have been an estimable character. If he had remained in Scotland, guided by local tradition he might have remained a charming individual and a useful member of society. But he was translated into a country where nothing remained stable, traditions withered, and the acquisitive code prevailed. In America the Norse blood claimed for him by his biographer asserted itself, and the religion he brought with him confirmed him in a course of life which another religion might have led him to criticize. *Corruptio optimi pessima* perhaps. (Incidentally, Lord Beaverbrook, though not by any means a parallel case, is the son of a Scots Presbyterian minister).

To the readers of newspapers millionaires are represented as benefactors and their lives the type on which every boy should model himself. That was very evident on the recent centenary of Carnegie's birth: according to the *Observer*, he will 'live in history as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, example of the successful business man with high ideals and the practical vision to carry them through.' Mellon is known as the Ambassador who received an honorary degree from Cambridge some time ago, Frick as the Steel King who left £10,000,000 worth of art treasures in his home, to be open to the U.S. public for ever. (*Daily Telegraph*).

To the *Times*, before the activities which led to his suicide were published, Kreuger was the courageous victim of circumstances—'No common adventurer . . . may well be regarded as a pioneer ahead of his time . . . Least of all does personal suspicion light upon him in his last day.' But as Professor Tawney observes, however much arrogance and greed there may have been in the past, 'men called these vices by their right names, and had not learned to persuade themselves that greed was enterprise and avarice economy.'

With the aid of statistics about libraries, laboratories, etc., it is possible to erect an imposing façade of benefactions by the rich. But such superficial quantitative measurement has not much meaning. Qualitative contributions to humanity are more important. In religion a George Herbert or a Newman count more than any Mellon—builder of a Presbyterian cathedral in Pittsburgh

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known as 'the Mellon fire-escape.' It is a platitude that money by itself can do nothing however pious the intentions of the will-maker. Carnegie money, the fruit of a lifetime of completely merciless acquisition, is put to widely varying purposes, sometimes laudable: it paid for the distribution in America of the *New Statesman* pamphlet on Abyssinia. Mr. Lloyd George's pension of 10,000 dollars a year from the same source will not perhaps meet with such general approbation. Even when one can agree that millionaire money has been spent to good purpose, there is a great deal to put into the opposite scale. There may be instances of large fortunes having been made without causing or increasing human misery; more important perhaps is the wastage of life and energy in the futile or anti-social industries, cosmetics or armaments, in which great wealth is commonly amassed.

A second point against such benefactions is made by Mr. Borsodi. 'It is a complete mistake to assume that without philanthropies of the Rockefeller type, the world would have been without the educational, medical and religious institutions and activities which their gifts brought into being. The institutions might not have become such grandiose institutions in point of size, but they might have been permitted a much greater degree of freedom to those who really created and conducted them,' etc. 'The Rockefellers of to-day "give" colleges, hospitals, foundations, just as the mediæval barons used to "give" monasteries, nunneries, chapels, and the Roman senators used to "give" baths and amphi-theatres. But in reality they "give" nothing. They merely return a part of what they were acquisitive and powerful enough to seize. Unfortunately they return these parts of their accumulations in forms and on conditions which lessen if they do not completely destroy their value to the public.' And 'in theory the advantages derived from combination might have been distributed to labor in higher wages or to the general public in the form of lower prices.' In a less anarchistic economy there would not be such large profits to dispose of.

I have chosen these books as sources of information about well-known captains of industry because the stock estimate is so widely accepted and yet so wide of the mark. Though criticism may only aspire to the humble functions of a louse; it may irritate the animal and perhaps draw attention to its ill-health. Not that