

“The Gospel of Wealth” by Andrew Carnegie (Excerpt)

Headnote:

Andrew Carnegie emigrated from Scotland to become one of the self-made rich during the late 1800s and establish a valuable steel business near Pittsburgh, PA. Below is his 1889, “Gospel of Wealth” essay, where he outlines his beliefs about the role that the wealthy should play in society.

The problem of our age is the proper administration of wealth, so that the ties of brotherhood may still bind together the rich and poor in **harmonious** relationship. The conditions of human life have not only been changed, but revolutionized, within the past few hundred years. In former days there was little difference between the dwelling, dress, food, and environment of the chief and those of his **retainers**... The contrast between the palace of the millionaire and the cottage of the laborer with us to-day measures the change which has come with civilization.

The price we pay for this (beneficial) change is, no doubt, great. We assemble thousands of (workers) in the factory, in the mine, and in the counting-house, of whom the employer can know little or nothing, and to whom the employer is little better than a myth. All (contact) between them is at an end. **Rigid** (classes) are formed, and, as usual, **mutual** ignorance breeds mutual distrust. Each (class) is without sympathy for the other, and ready to credit anything (disapproving) in regard to it...

Neither the individual nor the race is improved by (donations). Those worthy of assistance, except in rare cases, seldom require assistance... But the amount which can be wisely given by the individual for individuals is necessarily limited by his lack of knowledge of the circumstances connected with each. He is the only true reformer who is as careful and as anxious not to aid the unworthy as he is to aid the worthy, and, perhaps, even more so, for in (donations) more injury is probably done by rewarding wickedness than by dismissing **virtue**.

Thus is the problem of Rich and Poor to be solved. The laws of accumulation will be left free; the laws of distribution free. Individualism will continue, but the millionaire will be but a trustee for the poor; entrusted for a season with a great part of the increased wealth of the community, but administering it for the community far better than it could or would have done for itself...

...The man who dies leaving behind many millions of available wealth, which was his to administer during life, will pass away "unwept, unhonored, and unsung"...Of such as these the public verdict will then be : "The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced."

Such, in my opinion, is the true Gospel concerning Wealth, obedience to which is destined some day to solve the problem of the Rich and the Poor, and to bring ' Peace on earth, among men Good-Will."

Source:

Published June 1889, in *North American Review*.

Vocabulary Key

Mutual: a feeling or action held in common by two or more parties

Harmonious: free from disagreement or dissent

Rigid: firmly fixed or set

Virtue: moral excellence; goodness

Retainer: servant or follower



"Forty-Millionaire Carnegie in his Great Double Role," *The Saturday Globe*, 9 July 1892; from David P. Demarest, ed. *"The River Ran Red": Homestead 1892* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992), 189.