Chapter 16

The Poetry, Charm, Romance and Usefulness of Iron Ore

For a period of years Indian after Indian brought me samples of ore: iron, copper, nickel, silver, gold. I paid no attention to any but iron. It is as staple as wheat. During the period of no snow I searched the wilderness of the North from one rock zone to another, and always and ever east to west across the continental formation. In the winter I traveled. My idea was to know my own country first hand. I found it did not cost any more to travel than to remain stationary. In fact I was able, by increased knowledge, to earn more by traveling than if I had stayed at home. It appeared to be just as easy in traveling to have my wife with me, as to leave her alone at home, and we were both benefited, and it made us more contented and happy. Searching for further justification for travel, I happened to hit upon the rather lugubrious fact that the world does very well without all of us, so far as we know, after death, and if so, it, or any portion of it, ought to spare us handily during life.

Very early I discovered that in order to get the most good from travel, it was necessary to have clear-cut objects and purposes. So I decided to visit all the places in the world, if possible, where iron ore is produced in commercial quantities. A big undertaking. Naturally that involved a study of other lands, their resources and geology. Even that was not enough, so I added the study of government, and particularly the methods of Colonial government adopted by those powers chiefly engaged in colonizing the world: Great Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Holland. At one time or another, those peoples, possibly excepting Teuton and Slav, have ruled the earth.

From the study of modern government it was an easy step to
interest in the history of the yesterdays, and in dramatic person-
age such as Tsin, Akbar, Attila, Alaric, Timur Leng, Genghiz
Khan, Alexander, Xenophon, Cyrus, Xerxes, Napoleon and
other first-class mapmakers of the world. As a result I found my-
self traveling and studying the world in the winter and threading
a trackless wilderness in the summer. It was an ideal and also a
selfish life, which I was determined to desert as soon as I had
visited every country in the world that had its own autonomy,
and every suzerain state and colony of any importance. This my
wife and I completed to our satisfaction in 1913, after more than
thirty years of travel. Before we left our own country, we went
into every State and to Alaska and also visited our insular posses-
sions as rapidly as they were secured by the United States.

There is a romance about iron that has always fascinated me
and it holds me yet as a magnet attracts. I wonder if the coura-
geous men who seek it in the bowels of the earth realize their big
part in the life of the world? Do the brave, bare bodies that re-
flex the furnace light and the gloating glow of the smelter, do
d their work because of a subtle subconsciousness of the fact that
the wheels of the world and civilization would stop if they
stopped?

Iron ore and steel are of greater importance than wheat, be-
cause there are many good substitutes for wheat. There is none
for iron ore. It has a glory of usefulness all its own. Those who
are associated with its production should know of the dignity of
their calling; should realize it and then their hearts and souls
would fill their big bodies until brawn and spirit are one, as an
instrument of the joy of existence in the keen sense of service.
There would be a brotherhood of iron that could not know strife
if the totality of performance could be shown to the eyes of all
those who inhabit the world of steel. Nor would its boundaries
be smaller than those of the earth, for it would tie together the
best developed American iron worker and the lowliest African.

If the miner who blasts or shovels or trams a pound of iron
ore could follow it to its destinations and uses, he would at once
conclude that he is one of the most valuable and important factors of society. This is the truth. The same is true of the furnace-man and the foundryman, the worker in the steel mill, and the artisan of keen eye and trained hand who fashions the products of iron ore with mind and heart. True also of the master captains, who have organized the armies of the age of steel and iron, and who are really learning that their industrial soldiers give up their lives even more bravely upon the battlefields of constantly applied human effort, than those who rend each other at the cannon’s mouth.

From this realization it is only a step further to the practical conviction that they are entitled to even more consideration; to continuous employment (what kind of an army would it be that did not keep its soldiers constantly, but depended upon picking them up, helter skelter, when needed), to a minimum wage, to old age insurance and pensions, to adequate compensation for injury and death resulting from the risks of their work, to sanitary housing and moral environments. Menaces such as saloons are being removed. All of these things are of the moment. At first they were adopted because it is good business. Already they are reaching the deeper and finer source of their cause in the hearts and souls of mankind; in taking intimately home of the law of laws: I am my brother’s keeper. And this must comprehend social kindnesses as well as economic guardianship.

When industry was young, master and servant composed the family. There was friendship and acquaintance and sympathy. When growth reached such an extent that the master could not know his many servants and feel for them deeply, labor troubles began to beget. With the advent of artificial masters, corporations born by the law, marblesque and lacking human responsibility, the hiatus between master and servant widened almost unbridgeably. The cure is coming; is on the way; has already arrived sporadically, in the re-humanizing of industry.

Only can this finally be achieved by the master thinking as the servant thinks, and the servant thinking as the master thinks. There will then be no master and servant as now defined.
Rather there will be such a mutualization as will make for leader and led; for helper and helped.

Famished are the masses for want of human recognition and consideration. They unconsciously resent arrogance and overlordship with its coldness and autocracy; even the benevolent despotism of money. In America this is more true than it is in other countries.

Hunger for freedom, for equality, for opportunity, for escape from the oppression of false human pride has milked the best of the earth into our national pail. Here they swiftly obtain and ravenously cherish the wholesome idea that one man is as good as another. To believe that way; aye, to feel it in their heart of hearts, is why they have come here from the valleys and mountains of the earth.

Then when they see Old Man Slobson’s son Andy throwing on dog, chest swelled, elephantiasis of the cranium, hard of voice and glassy of eye, bossing them around like dogs, running over their children in his automobile and running over them in his manner, the very devil in them is aroused. They have known Old Man Slobson since boyhood; worked underground and on the surface with him, and they know that Andy is no better than they are.

But he is stronger, he can drive them; yes, and he can also enrage them. The artificial master without heart or conscience has set Andy up over them to grind their bodies and their souls. As an emollient to passion they do build libraries and clubs and schools, and gymnasia and such things, and these are all very well, but they mean nothing at all in the way of removing the sharp instruments, pride and power, that are digging away at the tender spots in labor’s manhood.

Everything physical may be supplied to those who work under bosses, good wages enough and all, and they will remain discontented and rebellious until the human touches are supplied: love, fraternity, association, kind words and deeds from the heart and not from the pocket book; real interest transcending commercial concern.
There never has been labor trouble where there has been personal understanding, personal acquaintance, and personal friendship, regard and respect between employer and employee. I know, because I have been an employee with pick and ax and barrow and shovel, and many a time I have felt like smashing the head of an arrogant boss, not because I was hungry, but because I was not treated as considerately as I would have been if I had been a brute.

I guess we got off the iron ore trail, but not far, for it leads into the hearts and minds of men, as well as into their arms and backs and purses.

There is war, that leveler of society; the great master surgeon of nations, operating upon the earth as the individual surgeon operates on the body. The knife is guided by the same unerring hand, directed by the All-seeing eye, and as the layman cannot see and know the mysteries of the hospital operating room, just so we cannot comprehend the purposes of the Great Surgeon of the universe.

Into cannon and into the surgeon’s knife enter iron ore. The bellowing death of one and the delicate life-saving of the other involves the use of steel. They were a lump of iron ore yesterday. Great locomotives made from iron rush over rails of iron ore, performing missions of peace and war. Harvest fields are gambogian in their ripeness and renitent until the reaping machines come. Then they lie down peacefully with that child of iron ore.

When the Crusader dreamed and gave his life to recover the land of Christ, the sword that gleamed with the glory of heaven and the zeal of deep desire was a thing of iron ore. The bread we eat is baked in pans made from iron ore, in ovens made from iron ore. Our span of life is ticked off by springs of iron ore in clock and watch.

Huge pumping engines, made from iron ore, handle water through pipes of iron ore for all the purposes of life. Ocean steamships, made of iron ore, throb with a life that is more than artificial. Giant cranes, made from iron ore, move about in Gargantuan majesty. One can look nowhere and think nowhere
without encountering manifestations of iron ore dug out of the earth and handled purposefully by real men. There is iron ore in our blood and body.

It is the age of iron ore. Let those who produce it hold up their heads with dignity and walk erect among men. They give to it their lives that it may serve mankind. No wonder the sewing machine and the automobile and the locomotive and the ship and all the things made from iron ore are so human. They are human, in that they have cost myriads of lives while making.

A workman’s average working life is twenty years. Many labor for a longer time, but few are at their best for even twenty years. A prize fighter’s life is ten years. The same forces are employed by the prize fighter and the skilled mechanic. Of course the latter applies them to higher purpose. He hammers something into useful shape, while the pugilist is hammering something into useless shape.

The heart beats seventy times a minute; forty-two hundred times an hour; one hundred thousand times a day; sixteen million times a year, and as many times sixteen millions as a person lives years. Each time the heart beats it lifts nearly a half pound of blood, and all of the twenty to thirty pounds of blood in the body are forced through the heart and lungs every minute. Each heart beat represents a punctuation of death. Just as the tick-tock of a clock tells off a measure of time that will never be again for you and me, so does each heart best reduce the total heart beats. The moment a child is born it begins to draw upon its bank account of expectant heart beats and expend them. A third of life is utilized in preparation for that portion of the span that is useful in a creative sense.

Every time an iron worker, or any other, lifts his hand or bends his back, just as many heart beats as occur during the time required for these physical demonstrations are expended, and the worker has given of his life in the proportion that they bear to all of the heart beats he will be vouchsafed.

In this way may be had some idea of exactly how men and women give their lives in labor. It may be imagined, if not yet
quite proven, that their lives enter into their productions affecting the character or quality of the article that is made. It is well known that the work of prisoners never makes for perfection. The more deeply one is in love with his work the better the product, and the happier the performance. All great inventions have resulted from freedom of effort applied with love.

When we think in this way we are not unreasonable if we think we can detect man’s life in all those things that are commonly called artificial, just as we may so plainly see God in everything.

In order to do the best work it follows that the worker must love to work and be loyal to self and to employer, whether the employer is yourself or some other. This feeling is possible in any degree of purity only when the spirit of the worker is permitted to flow freely, without being dammed by resentment and bitterness.