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EDITORIAL

ASTORIAN ABILITY.

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DESCRIBING in his recent *McClure's Magazine* article the policy pursued by the original John Jacob Astor in selecting for his purchases and investments only such real estate as lay along the lines of the probable future growth of New York City, Burton Hendrick quotes the "founder of the house of Astor" as saying:

"And after I have purchased them [the lands afore referred to and owned by the Knickerbocker yeomanry], what then? Simply sit down and wait. No anxiety, no sleepless nights, no work. Year after year the city will grow northward and gradually develop these farms. It can make no progress without first coming to terms with those who then own them. If I should be that happy man I would not even take the trouble to make my own improvements or put up my own buildings. In ten, twenty or thirty years the people will need the land badly enough to do these things themselves. Never had a man {been} given so splendid an opportunity to reap where others have sown."

And John Jacob Astor sat down and waited.

This may be "Ability," the distinctive quality of the capitalist, according to Prof. Mallock's Pindaric songs of the breed. And so it is—after a fashion. It is the identical Ability exhibited by the investor in "blocks of stock" that are "sold by the pound," but which his Ability tells him will rise in ten, twenty or thirty years to such prices that he will be able to reap a rich crop where others plow, harrow, sow and sweat. It is the Ability of the fisherman, who knows which course certain schools of fish will take, spreads his net—and sits and waits, and reaps the rich crop of juicy and flavored sea food that the fish labored to become.

The Astor, or the "Capitalist Ability"—undoubtedly an "Ability"—furnishes an illustration of the biologic principle "the survival of the fittest."

In biology, the survival of the fittest does not mean the survival of the best. It means the survival of that which is fittest for given environments—and the “fittest” may then be the “worst.” The environments that render the centipede the “fittest” to survive, pronounce man unfit,” and doom him. Likewise with “Ability.”

The “Ability,” that consists in coming it upon humans in the manner that fishermen come it upon fish, is a quality that needs for its environment a social system that depresses the masses down to the fish status, so to speak. No such social system, no such human schools; no such human schools, no chance for the fisherman of humans; hence, no chance for his style of “Ability.”

Astorian “Ability” is Capitalist “Ability.” Capitalist “Ability” is the centipede growth of economic swamp-and-jungle environments. The Time is undergoing the pains of travail of a social system in which the economic environments shall render Astorian “Ability” unfit to survive, and in which “the fittest” shall coincide with “the best” in survival.

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