
Truth and Fiction

by Eugene V. Debs

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Mr. George W. Childs, editor of the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, in a recent issue, has an editorial article captioned "Equality and Sympathy," which contains about equal parts of fact and fiction. The fiction is prominent, undisguised, while the facts are obscured by sophisms and special pleadings totally out of place, and which are made to subserve a purpose at war with common sense ideas of American equality. Mr. Childs starts out as follows:

Many excellent people, in their zeal for equality among men, and in their haste to abolish all class distinctions, overlook the laws of natural attraction and repulsion, which are as immutable in the sphere of humanity as they are in the domain of physical science. These reformers see with righteous indignation the false distinctions made by shallow and scornful people to separate the rich from the poor, the fashionable from the unfashionable, the stylish and expensive household from the plain and unpretending. But they would not only break down these barriers, but all others, and compel men and women to mingle together familiarly in social and domestic life, without regard to congeniality of thought or life, taste or temperament. It is as useless to antagonize a natural law as it is to fight the air. There must be some bond of sympathy, some mutual interest, something in each, that awakens a responsive chord in the other in order that any two persons shall take pleasure in each other's society.

There may be such "reformers" as the *Ledger* designates, but we are not acquainted with them, nor with their written or oral utterances. The fundamental American idea is expressed in the declaration that "all men are created equal," that they have "certain unalienable rights," such as "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The American idea of equality, the real idea, has no reference to what mere flunkeys call "equality." If there are those whom the *Ledger* styles "re-

reformers," who are trying to bring about a condition of things in which A, the workingman, shall demand that B, the millionaire, shall exchange visits, dine, dance, and drink together, then such "reformers" are cranks, really idiots. The workingmen of America have a lofty contempt, unmitigated scorn for American codfish aristocracy. They do not belong to the growing army of fashion's fools. The true reformer is a man who demands that "class distinctions shall not be supported by statute; that there shall be no "class legislation," that there shall be absolute equality before the law, and if the law anywhere under the American flag makes "class distinction" that that law shall be repealed. The workingmen of America need not be told that a Vanderbilt can dress in "purple and fine linen," that he can have a \$10,000 cook and fare sumptuously every day; he need not be told that when the millionaire travels it is in a palace car decorated with oriental magnificence. He knows that in the gatherings of such peacocks of society, such diamond decorated dudes and dunces, there is arrogance, pomp and pride, but such things only excite his derision, and he simply demands that such degenerate creatures shall not use their money power, nor any other power, to place laws upon the statute books which in any degree shall detract from their rights and privileges as American citizens.

The true reformers of the times, coming down to specialties, do not demand that the families of railway employees, men, women and children, shall "mingle together familiarly in social and domestic life," with the families of railway Presidents, bondholders, etc., the reformation demanded is that such dignitaries shall not use their position and power to degrade employees, that before the law, in every business relation, in every tribunal, the employed shall be recognized as the equal, the peer, of the employer. It is well known that notwithstanding the genius of our government and all of its institutions recognize this sort of equality, that laws have been enacted utterly subversive of it. Infamous laws have been enacted, well calculated to feed the arrogance of wealth, and courts have been debauched to an extent well calculated to create universal alarm. This apprehension of danger is not premature. The reform is not demanded a day too soon, and fortunately for the country, the workingmen of America have taken the matter in hand. They are intensely aroused and are everywhere massing their forces. The workingmen of America are the true reformers of the period. Caring nothing for what millionaires and their satellites call "class distinction," the workingmen of America have de-

terminated that such distinction shall not have the sanction of law nor of judicial decisions, and they are massing their strength and their intelligence to inaugurate permanent reforms.

In what we have said there is no appeal to sympathy or sentiment. The day has gone by for workingmen to prostrate themselves in the presence of those who seek to make the law subserve class distinctions. The working men are in the majority. The question is, will they unify for their own welfare? Those who are capable of reading the signs of the times will answer in the affirmative. Says the *Ledger*:

The real equality for which we should work is the equality of *opportunity*, the spread of the most favorable conditions of life, the extension of a fair chance to every one who comes into the world. Certainly this is a large work, involving many long and complicated processes, and demanding all the thoughtful wisdom and forceful energy that can be brought to bear upon it; but just as fast as it goes on so fast may we expect to see realized that complete brotherhood of man which we all long for. Whatever tends to promote intelligence, to spread education, to foster habits of industry and economy, to instill principles of justice and integrity, to turn the currents of passionate desire from channels of self-indulgence and vice into those of purity, love, and goodwill, will also tend to ensure an increasing sympathy and congeniality among our people and to draw them together by the only bonds which can never be broken. Every noble effort of philanthropy and reform, every public measure carried for the public benefit, every private attempt to teach the ignorant, to raise the fallen, to help the unfortunate, to comfort the distressed, to lift men and women to a higher level, is in fact working in the direct line of human brotherhood and true equality.

The fundamental idea of Government in the United States as we have said, is "equality of opportunity," equality in the matter of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." We started right. We made an announcement that thrilled the world. But the declaration, as the nation has advanced, has become like "dead sea fruit." It tempts the eyes, it delights the ear, but practically, in thousands of instances, life is a burden till it is not worth the living. We are required to contemplate it under the most revolting conditions. Men work and starve because the laws are vicious, because one class is permitted to prey upon another class. In such a condition of things the term "liberty" is one of cruel irony, and the "pursuit of happiness," as fruitless as to

seek for a cooling, life-giving spring amidst the sands of Sahara. We are not of those who believe in reforming the world by statute, but obstacles in the way of a fair race for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, placed there by law, can be removed by law. Indeed, it does not matter how or why they obstruct the highways of progress. Eades, by a simple contrivance, removed the bars at the mouth of the Mississippi, and dynamite annihilated the rocks of Hell Gate, and the united votes of workingmen in the United States can and will at no distant day expunge from the statute books of the States and of the Nation every unjust law that tends to degrade life, that abridges liberty, and that makes the “pursuit of happiness” a delusion.”

The fight is on. It is not a psalm singing crusade. It is the massing of a mighty force demanding fair play. It is the voice of sovereignty demanding that laws shall be just and courts undebauched. The reformation is on. The reformers are millions against the millionaires. The “fatherhood of God” is a fact; the “brotherhood of man” is a fact. They require no statute to establish them. The time may come when all men will recognize and be governed by their sublime teachings. Be this as it may, the demand of the present is to enact righteous laws, beat down idols and shams, monopolies and trusts, set limits to aristocratic insolence, and rapacity, and enthrone justice. The signs are auspicious. True reformers are federating. Victories have been achieved, and more are coming. Labor, in all the centuries gone, was never so exalted as in these closing years of the 19th Century. It has its champions in every forum. Its literature is making its way to the front and is holding its own grandly. Labor is learning its power and is wielding it for the general good.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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