

The fruit of the sacrifice

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Eight times has our Mother Earth bared her scarred breast to the bitter blast — eight times laid naked this unhealing wound whence blood still issues, this deep gash near her heart wherein they thrust her murdered children's bodies — the grave at Waldheim.

Eight weary years have the women wept, and the orphaned children placed upon their fathers' tomb their wreaths of tear-wet flowers.

Eight slumbrous years has the powerful silence lain upon those lips that, living, never unclosed save to utter defiance to the tyrant that strangled but could not subdue.

Eight solemn years has the sweet, dead voice that filled the gloomy corridors of Cook County Jail with the tender song of undying love, on the last night that it ever sang, been echoing over the world¹. Far, far beyond the black wall of the prison, borne on invisible wings, up, high into the garrets, and down, low, into the cellars of the world, floats the swan-song of death, till from out of the night of the people's sorrow, in near and far-off lands, the unknown voices waken and sing — *Annie Laurie*.

Eight rain-breath'd springs have the graves grown green, eight withering autumns turned old and white, and the immortal seed lain germinating in the furrow. For you, Grinnells and Garys of the world who for eight blasting years have borne upon your brows the burning brand of Cain, for you — the earthquake, for us, liberty.

Oh, there are so many things to gather from this grave, upon whose sodden grass the scarlet leaves whirl, and scatter — whipped in the November wind, flying in the faces of the thousands gathered there, even as the words of the dead men whirl and scatter, scarlet flaming, lighting blazes in the hearts they touch.

What shall we gather, comrades? What thought shall we bear away to serve us in another year of struggle for that cause to us most dear? What is the most priceless lesson we can learn from the martyrdom of Parsons, Fischer, Engel, Lingg, and Spies?

For the saddest thing to me in all these commemorations is that the most of us only drop the tears of regret, only say, 'Ah, they took away the best of our comrades — and there are none to fill their places'. The idea of incommensurable, irreparable loss, the idea that whatever good came from the agitation created was bought far too

dear, sends a continual pulsation of pain, a hopeless ache in the heart, such as one feels when the clang of the prison gate rings on the ear, and is told that a prisoner for life has gone in thereat.

Is this pain justified? Is it true that sacrifice is foolish, and martyrdom an uncompensated loss?

In the general breaking up of all our former conceptions based upon the theological idea of man and his relations, this is one that calls for an examination. All the history of the race, as we know, has been one long interlinking of sacrifice. Not a corner of the populated world so isolated, not a people so barbarous, not a religion so rude, not a reform so insignificant, but has had its Hofers, its Cranmers, its Savonarolas, breathing defiance under the mouths of guns or singing glorias from the centre of smoke! But at the heart of these ecstatic triumphs over death, has ever been the idea of a compensating God who for pains suffered here will grant reward of bliss hereafter!

Now modern science has proven that this God does not exist; nowhere in sky or earth or sea can any trace of him be found. On the contrary, telescope, microscope, spectroscope, all enter the protest that cannot be gainsaid against a belief in the existence of any mythical power which troubles itself about an individual's life or death; all confirm the utterance of that wise man who said: 'For what preeminence has man above the beast. As the one dieth so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath'. From the heights of the stars we hearken to the dust of the dead, and know that, truly, 'there is nothing new under the sun'.

Therefore the old belief, which sustained the martyrs of the past, the old certainty of reward which upheld the sacrifices of the past, plays no part in our view of the tragedy of 11 November. Since God no longer enters into our estimate of the conduct of life, we must either regard sacrifice and martyrdom as acts of individual folly and social waste, or we must find a scientific basis to justify them. That is, we must find some reason which will not contradict any well-grounded statement of the processes of nature (or as we commonly say natural law), some reason which will warrant a human being involuntarily becoming a handful of senseless ashes for the sake of an idea. For the nineteenth century has produced these men — men who bowed at no shrine, acknowledged no God, believed in no

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hereafter, and yet went as proudly and triumphantly to the gallows as ever Christian martyr did of old. It is known that Albert Parsons of his own free will returned and gave himself up to trial by the court which sentenced him to death, when in fact nothing was easier for him than to have left America till the storm passed. It is not so generally known that even till the last, even on the fatal Annie Laurie night, had he but signed the petition to the Governor, his sentence would have been commuted, and today he would have been free. He knew this: knew it to be a certainty; for had he been willing to sign the petition such a pressure would have been brought to bear upon Oglesby³ as he could not have refused.

When Parsons received Capt. Black's⁴ telegram from Springfield, urging him to do it, he placed the telegram upon the table and beside it — the *Marseillaise*.

It was to say: 'Let this answer that. Let the old strong song of defiance that the people have hurled against the rulers since '93 be my reply to those who bid me sue for my life at the feet of the state. No, I will not petition'.

Was it an act of folly? — or heroism? which?

Fielden, Schwab, and Neebe are free today. He might have been. Was it folly?

Let us see the facts a little further. He knew that he could be saved, but his comrades Lingg, Fischer, Engel, and Spies could not. They knew it too. Yet knowing it they said, 'Nevertheless we will sign if Parsons will. We are willing to record ourselves as cowards if by it we can influence him to save his life'. And in that hope Spies did sign the petition though he knew it would be rejected. But Parsons said: 'I will not sign. What is my life that for its sake my comrades should stand before the world as cowards, and their death be lost to the cause? What is my life that for it they should satisfy the passion of the state's attorney, when he said, 'I want to make them do something for which the Anarchists shall hate them'. Take your petition. I will not sign'.

Ah, Mr. Grinnell, astute as you are, you failed. You did not make them waste the wine of the sacrifice; you could not make the Anarchists hate them. No — but for every drop of blood you spilled on that November day you made an Anarchist. You sent their words

on wings of flame in many tongues and many lands: where you hoped to sow the seed of hate the immortelles of love have bloomed; and tonight ten thousand, nay thrice ten thousand repeat in reverence the names of Parsons, Fischer, Engel, Lingg, and Spies.

Lost? Lost to the cause? Gained! gained a thousand fold! Whenever men dream of liberty, and dreaming dare, and daring strike, there above them, white, luminous, shining, as they stood upon the scaffold, appear the ghosts of Parsons, Fischer, Engel, Spies. Wherever in the horrible conflict between laborers and soldiers a shattered, shredded striker is borne away by his comrades, who looking on his blood hate deeper, there walks the mangled corpse of Louis Lingg, that brave, beautiful boy who, tossing his proud head, 'with his tawny hair like a lion's mane', and gazing with dauntless eyes full at the court about to sentence him, exclaimed: 'I do believe in force, hang me for it!'

'Ah,' you say, 'you are talking poetry'. Let us see if we are not near the solution of the problem of martyrdom — the answer to the question, 'what shall it profit a man if he aid a cause, and yet lose his own life, since there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither he goeth'.

Let us, then, ask another question, What is 'a man'? The theological idea was a soul and a body. But science says the body is so much lime, so much iron, so much sulphur, so much carbon, and so on, which disintegrate at death and pass into other forms but cannot be destroyed. But what is the soul? The scientist answers a compound, an organism of certain psychological elements, just as much facts as the physical ones which accompany them. The soul of man is so much courage, so much energy, so much prudence, so much daring, so much poesy, so much fear, hope, and so on through the qualities that make a man. As the body of every individual is a little different in the proportions of its composition from every other so is the soul. This is all that makes an individual. But the soul-elements, like the body-elements, are common to all mankind, and at death nothing is lost in the one case any more than in the other — only transmuted. Death, indeed, to the person who has thrown aside the old ideas of God and immortality, simply means a setting free of original elements to form new combinations — the

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lower forms being weeded out by the slow but certain action of natural selection, the higher constantly becoming more active and beneficent.

To all the nobler elements of our comrades, brought so strongly forth in that unjust trial, sentence, incarceration, and execution, death meant only an intenser, larger life. And when I say this I do it not only from my own theoretical standpoint, but in the certain knowledge that such was their belief and acceptance in the case of Parsons and Fischer at least. I know it from the lips of one who never lied, one who lifted their standard when it was stricken down, one who saw them day after day in prison, one who would have gone to the scaffold with them, one who, strangled by the invisible rope of poverty, now lies six feet deep in the eternal dark with the eternal smile upon his lips — Dyer D. Lum! And these were his words: 'In so exalted a state were they, so sure that death by the gallows was but a means of spreading further into the hearts of the people they loved the ideas apart from which they had no life, that it was exactly the truth when Fischer said: 'This is the happiest moment of my life!' And those who saw his face say that it shone with a white light on the scaffold'.

This then is the justification of sacrifice even to death, that through it the most active and enduring element in the martyr's personality is projected into the infinitely greater life of the race.

Let us bear this thought with us. Let us believe that from under the granite shaft at Waldheim, from under the stone pedestal whereon the warrior mother, with the great, sorrowful stern eyes, stands, grasping the dagger while she drops the laurel on her slaughtered child, from under the earth and the night and the blight of death, we hear again: 'Let the voice of the people be heard!'⁵; and low in the ear that listens the murdered five repeating,

'I am not dead, I am not dead;
I live a life intense, divine!
Yours be the days forever fled,
But all the morrows shall be mine.'