

Our martyred comrades

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My heart is away at a grave tonight — a grave I see as I saw it once — I think I shall always see it so — lying green and sweet in the October light, that flung its clean unbartered gold so generously on leaf and blade and stone; and all around in the soft wind the tremulous flittings and murmurings, that made one feel not in a place of Death, but in a place of Peace. I see again that speaking stone, that 'silence that is more powerful than voice', the pedestal with its graving, the warrior woman and the martyr dead; I feel the last strenuous agony in the drawn limbs, the shakeless resolution in the warrior mother's sad, stern eyes; beyond to the right I see my companion's figure, half turned from me, his hand shading his eyes; and then across the sunlight, between me and the stone, I see a woman with a little child by the hand; I see them stop, and hear the pitying pathos in the woman's voice as she says to my comrade softly in German:

'All under one stone?'

'All under one stone', he answers; and there is a low inarticulate exclamation of pity, while the child stands with a shadow of awe on its face. And then I hear the voices from beneath the sod, the voices that Death sent crying on all the winds of the world, till all men shall hear and know what they died for. Today it is said that they died because they preached a gospel of destruction and of hate. Oh, they died because they loved too much! Because they could not see the pain, the madness, the blind struggles of ignorance, and be silent, considering themselves. What did it matter to them that this poor sad animal Man is apt to turn in his rage and tear the one who would help him? Did they not know it? Did they not know that the spirit of authority, stamped into the human soul by unknown thousands of years, would seek its vengeance? But what did it matter? They had their message to deliver, their hope to give, the fulness of their being to express. What matter, if it led them down into the storm and night?

And what was their message? Why, that real justice and real liberty might come on earth; that it was all false, all unnecessary, this wild waste of human life, of bone and sinew and brain and heart, this turning of people into human rags, ghosts, piteous caricatures of the creatures they had it in them to be, on the day that they were born; that what is called 'economy', the massing up of things, is in reality

the most frightful spending — the sacrifice of the maker to the made — the loss of all the finer and nobler instincts in the gain of one revolting attribute, the power to count and calculate. Out of the deep sense of giant wrong done to themselves and their fellows, out of their abiding faith that it needs only to see where the wrong lies, only to realize what possible change might come, and the workers must rise in mass and restore themselves with a strong hand to their right, they cried out. Theirs was a burning message, red at the heart, and leaping in flame from lips that did not stop to pick and choose their words. They preached in the common highway, and gathered to themselves all who willed to listen. They preached in the common language; for they were workingmen, who did not study how to turn periods, but wished to be understood. They said what they meant, and all they meant; and that, perhaps, was unwisdom; but if so, it is the common mistake of all the great fervid souls that have ever scorched their way through the callous rind of Man, and touched the torpid heart within, till it beat drum-music.

They believed that Lincoln and Grant were right, when they predicted further uprisings of the people, wild convulsions, in the effort to reestablish some equilibrium in possessions. They were revolutionists, who believed that the revolution could not be wrought out peacefully, because of the historic tendency in the possessors to use force, whenever their privileges are threatened. They said so: they advised their fellows to prepare for these things.

In this, they may have been mistaken. It may be that the diffusion of ideas and of the spirit of freedom may take such hold upon the general mind, as will give us what we never yet have seen, a great social change without violence or destruction. Let us hope so. But hope cannot blind us to the fact that so far their prophecies have been fulfilled; and that not for any great change, but for a meager bettering of conditions within the existing system, men are shot upon the roads; and their corpses cry up from the sod for justice, receiving none. What like, then, is it to be when they ask for all that which nothing but their own ignorance keeps them from demanding? When they ask for the restoration and the perpetual indivisibility of the earth and the great stores within her bosom? When they ask for the free use of that which the genius of Man, not of men, has made?

When they reclaim their right to the best in the world, not to the meanest and poorest? When they ask for room, and plenty of room, each and every one — no meagre little yard fenced in with walls, but acres — acres without fences where they may watch things grow and blossom, and feel again the joy of life and the sweet kinship with all living things — learn the forgotten lore of the savage who knew all the colors of the leaves, and the shapes of them, and the way they turned to the sun, and the peculiar instrument that played in the throat of every bird, and the promises of weather that boded in the sky, and saw every night a full clear unbroken view of the great arch with all its stars, not a blue patch cut into angles with roofs, fouled with smoke, seen out of the cellar of existence? When the Man with the Hoe shall look up from the sod, and beholding the glory that is around him, shall see in the clod what he has not seen before — beauties and possibilities endless, where before was only a heavy dull thing, that resisted his hoe, but must be turned for its master's sake — nay, when he shall feel in himself, till now the cold, dull, heavy human clod, something stirring towards birth, towards growth, towards light and liberty? When the nature that has been repressed in him, chilled, frosted, bound in abeyance, shall struggle into gleams in those sad eyes, and soften the brute jaw, and push out the backward slanting brow? When he shall feel tumultuous throbbings, beating, beating ineffectually but powerfully within him — the desire to seize something indistinct, which shines, palely luminous in his old darkness — the vision of a larger fuller life, the yearning for selfhood, self-expression, *being* that of which he dreams?

Oh, no longer to echo the thoughts of others — to bring forth a note of one's own! No longer to move at the word of others — to move or be still at one's own desire!

What will it be, when the digger in the depths, down in the blackness and the foulness, pictures to himself the life of light, and takes it boldly? When the toiler amid the machineries, in the clang and clash and roar, demands for his ears the sounds which mellow, the silence which stills?

If for this paltry thing, an hour less of labor, a small wage-increase, men are shot upon the road, what will the answer be when they demand all this?

We do not know. But all this, not one jot or tittle less than this, Anarchism means. It means awakening of soul and body, brain and heart; and good-bye forever to the slave's content with small concessions. Perhaps when the rich and the rulers realize this, when they understand that the non-possessors have wakened to their own powers and possibilities, they will respect those whom they despise so now, whose lives they hold so cheap; for respect is generally given to him who respects himself, and contempt to him who crawls; perhaps when they know that ours is a universal gospel, having its word for them, as well as for the poor, offering them the same as the others — full life, liberty, better ideals and purposes, they too may accept it and voluntarily join with us in working out the problem of society in freedom. But with them or without them, hand-in-hand, or hand against hand, through life or through death, humanity in mass moves towards the Land of Freedom.

And, to borrow the imagery of Olive Schreiner, many are they who go down to the dark river that lies between — 'and are swept away', and are drowned; 'their bodies do not even build the bridge'. And when at last the future men and women shall pass over 'the bridge built with bodies', it will be the unremembered dead, falling today on every hand, in field and factory and mine, whose corpses shall be the piers whereon it rests. I speak of the daily sufferers, the helpless victims of capitalism and the State, who die and know not why they die.

But these, our comrades, who were self-conscious, reasoning, who went with clear eyes to the gallows and died triumphantly as ever any martyr did of old — they of whom even their bitterest enemies had to say 'they died like brave men', they will be known and remembered long, even in the Land of Freedom. We shall feel their living heart-beats, as we step upon this swaying bridge; we shall hear their death words crying till the fields of life are won; and up along the banks of the farther shore, there comes a drifting of unborn voices singing, 'Blessed are the dead who died for freedom'.

Shall I say over again what we have said every year, these thirteen years — that the specific act with which they were charged (conspiracy with the thrower of the Haymarket bomb) was never remotely proven? Shall I repeat that the trial was unfair, the jury

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prejudiced, the judge committed to conviction, the prosecutor openly bragging they had packed the jury to hang? Governor Altgeld has saved me the trouble of all this. Whoever will dispassionately read his 'Reasons for Pardoning Fielden, Neebe, and Schwab', will know it beyond a doubt; they are taken from the court testimony itself — you can ask nothing more.

They were tried and hanged for preaching Anarchism; the bomb-thrower was never known, probably never will be. Whoever it was, he threw it as an act of resistance to the unconstitutional proceeding of the police in breaking up a peaceable meeting. The aggression began with the guardians of law and order, who fired into the crowd, and drew forth a bomb as an answer to their bullets. Right or wrong, it had nothing to do with the right to advocate opinions; but it served as the lever to move the machinery of the law against our comrades.

It is all false that the hanging was done because of their preaching violence; it is not violence the ruling classes object to; for they themselves rule by violence, and take with the strong hand at every door. It is the social change they fear, the equalization of men. Tyranny has often mistaken its means; and the rulers of Illinois repeated history. What they would have destroyed, they multiplied; where they would have cursed, they blessed. And many a one will say with me tonight, in answer to the question, 'What made you an Anarchist?' 'The hanging in Chicago'.

Well, they are gone; and we who are here tonight may not have long to stay; for we are moving down past the middle line; and those who live 'the strenuous life' rarely live to be old. But few or many our years, we shall spend them working for that which to us is the only thing worth working for — the free life.

To the fervent hopes and efforts of the younger generations, we commit the memories of thirteen years ago, praying them never to forget the price paid by the dead nor the anguish of some yet living; never to forget that the way to honor a sacrifice is to follow up the spirit of it; and that if to you too has come the Vision of Man made one — without countries, nations, divisions, classes, without authorities priestly or civil, with the peace that is real, the equality which means free self-expression, be bold to bear witness to it;

picture it; work for it; live for it if you can; die for it if you must.
Remember the dungeon and the gallows tonight, and the flesh, warm
like yours, that is dust, or corroding in prison cells — and be not
silent under pain of condemnation of your own soul, that last judge,
to whom all courts are as nothing, to whom you can tell no lies, and
who will be with you to the edge of doom. True to your ideal, you
may at the end speak to scoffer and persecutor the beautiful lines
quoted by our beloved Parsons, near the last:

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.















