

November eleventh,
twenty years ago

Delivered in New York, 11 November
1907. Published in *Mother Earth*
(New York), November 1907.

A peaceable meeting of protest against a murderous attack of the police on strikers, a meeting already half dispersed because of an approaching storm; an unprovoked attack by two hundred police upon the remnant of the meeting; a sullen glow in the air, a dull and angry roar, wounded and dying police and citizens, terror and consternation, bewildered faces and flying feet, a panic-stricken city full of the savagery of fright! So passed the 4th of May, 1886, into history.

A wild and insane spirit of revenge, a determination to hang somebody, as many as possible, a crystallization of that determination in a conspiracy theory which would drag in those whom the police and the partisans of Old Order most dreaded, a vicious resolution to use every method, every trick no matter how shameful, to bring eight men to the gallows; to deceive and inflame the public mind, to twist the law, to admit prejudiced jurors, to suborn perjury, to rule out every fair-minded person from a chance of influencing the trial in favor of the accused, to convict at all costs and to hang, that was the task the social powers set themselves; and they fulfilled it; and with the hanging of their victims the curtain went down upon the tragedy, and the 11th of November passed into history.

There was a comedy played afterwards — a comedy in which the victimizers became the victims, and paid over thousands of good round dollars to their servants, the police, for protecting them from conspiracies which were hatched in the police stations. The comedy lasted about three years, and was very funny — to the policemen who divided the spoils. It, however, has *not* passed into history; it was thought better to preserve the memory of it by oral tradition.

The tragedy however is written; it is in the school histories of the country, and every child who studies the administrations of the presidents learns about it; and this is what he learns: that in the year 1886 there were many strikes and labor troubles; that there was a small but dangerous class of people in Chicago, called Anarchists; that at one of their meetings a bomb was thrown, killing a number of policemen, and several of the Anarchist leaders were convicted of conspiring to throw it, and hanged.

All up and down the land millions of school children learn that paragraph, with such additional embellishments as their teachers see fit to provide, and the half-truth and altogether lie of it, goes on killing the souls of the murdered men as once the scaffold killed their bodies. Only — long ago the preachers told us — *souls cannot be killed*; and in spite of all the malice and the injustice and the ignorance and stupidity that have heaped and are heaping outrage on their memory, the conquering voices of the dead men rise, and the conquering spirit that animated them in those days of bitter doom, the spirit of love and faith in human possibility triumphing over all oppression and suppression, slowly makes its way.

Twenty years have died upon their graves since they died on the gallows; and venom and spite and fear, most venomous of all, have had their say. Yet other voices sometimes have spoken; great lawyers have said it was a shame; and General Trumbull tried the judgment, after Gary had thought it necessary to defend it;²⁰ and John P. Altgeld said and did a thing or two. And now, after twenty years, a man of different stamp has spoken, and a great conservative magazine has published his say. *Appleton's Magazine* for October contains an article entitled 'The Haymarket and Afterwards,' by Chas. Edward Russell, a newspaper reporter for the *NY World* in 1887; and though there is much misinformation therein (when did a newspaper scribe ever neglect to furnish misinformation), the general intent is plainly to do justice to the memory of the murdered men. I do not know whether this Mr. Russell tried to do anything to save them while they were yet alive; I have never heard that in all these twenty years he tried to tell the world the truths he has told here. But it is something that at last he has spoken and said that the conspiracy charge was conceived in a spirit of revengeful fury; that the working out of it was intrusted to a man afflicted with delusions, who arrested every person that spoke defective English as a direful conspirator, and extracted confessions to suit his purposes; that the methods of the trial were 'unusual' (surely Mr. Russell did not choose a harsh word there); that, 'so far as the record goes, the bomb might have fallen by accident, or been hurled by a lunatic, or by somebody that never heard of the accused men.'

Very grateful I am to Mr. Russell for his tribute to the beauty and

magnanimity of Albert Parson's character. Very glad I am that he has told the readers of *Appleton's* how till the end, till the very last, Parsons could have saved his life had he complied with the formality of the law and signed the petition to Gov. Oglesby, but that he would not do so, because he would not desert those others whose lives could not be saved.

What he does not add is this: that Fischer and Engel were willing to sign the petition if he agreed to it; not that they hoped for themselves, but hoped for him; but he, knowing they could not be saved, said, 'Then every night in Joliet upon retiring and every morning on arising, I should be haunted by the thought that I had made cowards of them in vain. No: I shall die with them.'

Not grateful to Mr. Russell am I for his contemptuous rating of Adolph Fischer, and his miserly recognition of the abilities of Spies and Schwab and Fielden; yet one cannot quarrel with another's impressions so long as there is no malice in their statement, and I let that pass. But when it comes to Lingg, then all at once the fair man disappears, and the sensational news artist, the descriptive magician we all learned to know so well twenty years ago, comes to the surface. Under his prestidigitation the human being disappears, and a monster stands before you, clothed with 'abnormal strength of body and capacity of mind'; a slim boy of twenty-one becomes a 'secret, wily, resourceful and daring conspirator,' 'a wild beast,' 'a modern berserker,' 'the least human man' he ever knew, 'a formidable' creature, pacing 'up and down the jail corridor,' with 'a lithe, gliding and peculiar step,' etc., etc. The more I read, the more forcibly became the contrast between this Lingg of Mr Russell's conceiving, and the Lingg painted by a good, kindly German lady who used to take the prisoners something to eat sometimes. One day he said to her, 'I was dancing in my cell last night. They had a ball over there somewhere, and I heard the music, and oh! I did so want to be there and dance.'

Inhuman desire on the part of a youth of twenty-one. Had Mr Russell seen him dancing in his cell, he would probably have read abnormal physical or mental something-or-other into this pathetic attempt of a caged young creature to pass the lonely hours of a prison cell.

But the reason for Mr Russell's peculiar visions, concerning Lingg, is that he feels nearly certain that Lingg made the Haymarket bomb, Lingg conceived the slaughter of the police, Lingg founded the Lehr and Wehr Verein, Lingg was the only Anarchist of the seven, Lingg was — everything in short, except the bomb-thrower. The latter was, he says, Rudolph Schnaubelt. He does not give his reason for these opinions, he simply makes assertions.

Now as to the Lehr and Wehr Verein, it was not founded by Lingg; he was a member, but not the founder nor suggester of it. In the second place, the Lehr and Wehr Verein had nothing to do with the Haymarket bomb. It would be rather ridiculous to suppose that a society composed of some hundreds of people, organized to maintain its civil rights because of the ballot-box frauds which had wrested their political victory from them, should be led by the nose by one man, and he a mere boy. In the third place, I do not believe Lingg made the Haymarket bomb, for the reason that he pointed out the differences between it and the bombs he did make; and while I do not think he was superhuman, either mentally, physically, or morally, I think he was an exceedingly courageous man and an honest one; and I do not believe he would have resorted to any petty subterfuges before the court. I think if he had done that thing, he would have said so, as boldly as he did say other things. There was no want of candor in his speech.

Mr Russell's confident identification of the bomb-thrower is probably based on the letter written by Schnaubelt taking the responsibility for the act, which may or may not have been true. A lot of fairy stories always arise around a mystery of this kind, and between one man's imagination and another's, the mystery gets so elusive that even shrewder guessers than Mr Russell find themselves at sea and adrift. I believe that the matter will remain a mystery as it has remained for twenty years. Capt Black has said, in a statement printed in the life of Parsons, that in his last endeavors to secure a reprieve for the condemned men, the effort was made on the ground that he had reliable assurance that the bomb-thrower would deliver himself up and prove that he was a stranger to the accused and that they had no complicity with him. The reprieve was not granted, and our comrades being slain, I can see no motive for the bomb-thrower's

ever revealing his identity. A masked and silent figure, he has passed across the world, and left his mark upon it. What does it matter now who he was; it was not one of the eight men whom the State punished for it.

There are other legendary matters in the article, things positively untrue; but they do not greatly matter; the public may believe that Lingg's sweetheart gave him a bomb to kill himself with, if it likes. I do not. The public may believe there were precisely fourteen Anarchists, believers in the use of physical force, grouped together in Chicago. I take the statement with—salt. The public may believe the statement that the police behaved with conspicuous courage in the face of the bomb, and 'did not falter'; that 'they closed up their ranks, drew their revolvers, and began to fire upon the dumbfounded people who fled in all directions.' I should not, myself, have thought it required conspicuous courage to fire upon dumbfounded and fleeing people. Moreover, I have been told of a gentleman who being wounded in the leg by some splinter of the bomb, sought refuge in a closet to whose friendly shelter six policemen had fled before him. They begged him 'not to give them away.' The position may have been undignified and not altogether heroic, but I do not blame those six policemen.

But all these things matter little now. What matters now is that the world shall know how and for what our comrades died. Mr Russell says: 'The world of men outside our country seems to have accepted the belief that the defendants were tried on the charge that they were Anarchists. It may be well, therefore, to recall that they were tried merely on the charge that they were accessories before the fact, of the murders of Mathias J. Degan and others.'

The world outside our country thinks very correctly that our comrades were tried for being Anarchists and hanged for being Anarchists; over and over again the State's Attorney repeated that 'Anarchy was on trial'; his final appeal was: 'Hang these eight men and save our institutions. These are the leaders; make examples of them.'

Well they made the example. They murdered these men, not because of evidence that they had conspired to murder Degan, but because they preached the gospel of liberty and well-being to all, and

an end of institutions which enslave the many to the few. The men are dead; twenty years are dead; but the strange doctrine that they preached is not dead, nor 'stamped out,' nor forgotten; the doctrine that there need be no poor and forsaken in the world, no shelterless, no freezing ones, no craven and cowering ones, biting the dust for a crust and a rag, no tyranny of masters nor of rulers; that all these are not, as we have been taught, necessary, but only ignorant and foolish; that life may mean wide opportunity and rich activity for every human being born; that mankind has only to conceive its own possibilities, cease preying upon itself, and combine its powers for the conquest of the earth, for toil to become easy and fruitful a thousand-fold, so all may have the good things of the earth; and more than that, may have free time to learn what really are *good* things, to modify its barbarian tastes, to escape from the vulgar ideals imposed upon it by its dead past and its slavish present, its stupid pursuit of valueless things, begotten by this profit-making system of production, free time to partake of its heritage in the triumphs of science, which only too often remain barren in the studies of great thinkers, unfruitful because of the lack of the practical genius of the common man, or worse, become the instruments of further robbery in the hands of power. This is strange doctrine; men die for preaching it. And yet another stranger doctrine, though really it is as old as man himself, that these things are to be won, not by entrusting power to legislators, but by the direct dealing of the sympathetic support, finally by complete socialization of the sources and means of production. If in the final struggle, as a measure of resistance, force became necessary, then use it. For saying these things our comrades died; the Haymarket bomb was only the excuse for silencing their tongues.

Well the tongues are silenced; but now 'the silence speaks,' as the prophet voice foretold. Still from the prison earth in the shade of the gallows tree, there springs the blossom of human hope, the blood-root blossom, the blossom with the wax-white face and the red, red root. Strange it should grow always there. Lilies from black mud, and hope, the highest hope, from the carmined stone of sacrifice. Yet thousands pluck the blossom, and hold it to their hearts; and the ideal of our dead waxes in the eyes of the living. And eyes meet

eyes, and the light of them crosses the seas and the boundaries of the nations; and the dream grows, the dream of the common fraternity of humankind, and the equal liberty of brothers. And Greed and Tyranny and Patriotism, dividing man from man, making them strike foul blows against each other these weary thousand, thousand years will die—hard—but they will die; for they are of the past, the dead; and the new world, our world, the nationless world of free men, belongs to the living and the future.



Voltairine de Cleyre
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