On Picket Duty.

It recently has become illegal in the State of New York for a man to practice the profession of architecture without first submitting to examination and procuring a license from a specially-constituted commission. I know two architects in New York City, as to what one of them, John Beverley Robinson, Anarchist, thinks of this sample of State Socialism, I need no reassurance; he unquestionably condemns it. What the other, J. H. Edelmann, Socialist, thinks of it is a matter of less certainty. I imagine that he disapproves also, but if so, it is because he is not logical in his Socialism.

Some years ago, when Walt Whitman seized upon the occasion of the death of the Emperor William to sing his praises of that brutal tyrant, I administered to my favorite poet, in this journal, as stinging a rebuke as I knew how to write. I have reason to believe that my words shamed the good Walt, and I know that they met the approval of his staunchest champion, William D. O'Connor. But, having "done my duty," as a moralist would say, I then let the matter drop, and probably never should have referred to it again, if Comrade Lloyd had not declared, in his article in this issue, that, as broad as Walt's sympathies were, he never identified himself with a tyrant. When the dead are men like Walt Whitman. I am ready to say nothing but good of them, if others will say nothing but truth of them. But as I have only been forgiven where Comrade Lloyd has forgotten, I cannot allow him to establish as historical truth an error which no one but myself would ever be likely to correct.

Some Western legislature has passed, or is about to pass, a law making it a criminal offence on the part of an employer to discharge or threaten to discharge an employee belonging to a trades-union or other organization objectionable to the employer. At which violation of liberty sundry journals of prominence are exceedingly irate. Certainly I share their indignation. But I confess that I should be considerably hotter under the collar, if these same journals would occasionally share my indignation when the courts treat as criminals those members of the trades-unions who threaten to withdraw their patronage from objectionable employers. When liberty is invaded from this side, these editors rub their hands with glee, and declare that such disturbers of law and order cannot be too summarily dealt with. Or, if the invasion is too plain to be denied, they simply keep silence. Take an instance. There is a fanatical restaurant-keeper named Dennett, who has several establishments in New York, several in Philadelphia, and others elsewhere. He decorates these with scripture texts, and practically forces his waiters to hold prayer-meeting twice a day. Not sharing his fanaticism, they rebel, and some of them recently struck. One of them posted on a telegraph pole a label three inches square, bearing these words: "Boycott Dennett's Restaurants. For this indisputably legitimate act he was arrested, brought into court, and punished. So far as I know, not a single journal has protested. "Liberty" not only protests, but makes itself an accomplice by joining in the boycott. Personally I have boycotted the Dennett establishments systematically for years. Rather than purchase so much as a sandwich over a Dennett counter, I would go hungry many days. I urge all my friends to do likewise. The court which should punish me for this would as truly invade my liberty as the legislature invades an employee's liberty in forbidding him to discharge an employee. How long must "Liberty" and two or three papers like it be alone in demanding that the liberty of labor shall be equal to the liberty of capital, and that the liberty of capital shall be perfect?

The Old Song.

[Henry Maret in Le Radical]

Every week I am obliged to straddle my hobby, because no week passes without offering me several opportunities to do so. Here they are, forming a new league, to prevent us from working on Sunday. Let us work on Sunday if we wish to, and let us not work if we do not wish to. What a singular mania for not leaving to each his liberty!

This one is determined that I shall read the books which suit him, and that I shall not read the books which do not suit him; that one wishes to force me to go to mass; still another wishes to force me not to go. James insists that I shall have what are called moral roads. And if it does not please me to have them? Peter insists that I shall not believe in God. And if it pleases me to believe in him? I answer so it is with everything. There are only people who cannot suffer me to live in my own fashion and who are furiously bent on having me live in theirs. Yet they get red in the face with anger against those who wish to impose an opinion upon them; but they will not allow that they should not impose their own. And this is why the world turns in a vicious circle, in which, by dint of turning, it continually finds itself in the same place again.

A stupid exception to a good rule. When men possess one secret or one creed, or love one land, or struggle for one need, they draw the other brutally and human.

They only hate apart who love one woman.

John Burke & Kelly.
Fin-de-Siecle Blackmail.

Politics sinks lower every year. The profession of the legislator and that of the blackmailer are rapidly blending into one. Things were quite bad enough, we thought, when dishonest men went unbidden to the lobbies of the legislative halls for the purpose of bribing law-givers to pass laws framed in their interest and giving them special privileges. But they are much worse now. The law-givers having sold to the capitalists nearly all the franchises that it is possible to conceive of, the commerce of the lobby has been gradually growing dull through lack of goods to sell and consequently of buyers. The law-givers, thus bereft of their customary prospect of boodle, have set their wits to work to revive the declining market, and as a result, tired of waiting for further offers from the dishonest for the passage of laws in their interest, they now make a regular practice of tempting men with no disposition to dishonesty to bribe them not to pass laws against their interest. In short, they are becoming simple blackmailers.

Here is the "true iniquity" of the immemorial (I beg the indulgence of the liberal part of the New York "Sun," for this extravagant adjective, since, being an Anarchist, I cannot be expected to praise English bills introduced in Congress and the State Legislatures to harass the followers of legitimate callings. Threatening honest laborers and tradesmen with all sorts of restrictions and annoyances and tyrannies, they hope that the objects of these threats will take fright and deliver. Too often—in fact, generally—the game works. But the victims are beginning to see through it. The druggists of New York, for instance, are indulging in muriatic witticisms regarding a bill aimed at them from Albany. The day is bound to come when the members of some rich and influential trade will stand back upon their rights, declare to deliver, and refuse to recognize the law. That will be a great day for Anarchism, for it will pave the way and furnish an all-powerful precedent for that movement of organized passive resistance, destined sooner or later to throw off the most onerous and tyrannical of all the restrictions that now oppress labor and hinder the production and distribution of wealth— the restrictions placed upon the issuance of money and the occupancy of land.

Give the blackmailers, then, all the rope they want. They are sure to hang themselves.

Wiles of the Social Man.

Referring to Liberty of December 5, 1891, giving "To-Day's" article, "The Law and the Formula," and an editorial paragraph thereon, and now to "To-Day" of January 28, 1892, in which "The State vs. the Man," I imagine that Mr. Tucker is not so well pleased with this latter article as with the former, and may be thinking with myself that "To-Day" has contrived after all to annex a considerable exception to that which it asserted to be complete without any.

At first it said: "The perfect and complete law of justice is already contained in the proposition, Every man is free to do what he wills. The idea is absolutely complete."

Hereupon I outlined a chapter in which I shall discuss the imaginative character of the formula, its inherent limitations, and different shades of meaning in the predicate according to the applications intended. This in one ordinary sense, the common sense in politics, no man is permitted (free) to do whatever he wills. His "natural right" is not questioned. He encounters a proviso that he shall not exercise an aggressive freedom. This proviso, then, in the political sphere, describes a limitation.

But I was not prepared to find "To-Day," explaining away the subject. If the reader cannot rely upon the words "every man" as being unambiguous, what can he rely upon in discussion with Spencerians? In its last article, already referred to, it begins by saying that the law of equal freedom in its most general form is very simple, but "generally itself to easy misapprehension"; that antecedent considerations should be borne along; and speedily affirms: "The law of equal freedom is a social law. Inasmuch as some persons succeed in diverting the notion of man of nearly all its social connotations, the first circumscription of the idea of equal freedom is that it applies only to social men. Secondarily, retaliation is excluded by the idea of equal freedom."

Who can beat such a proviso? The words "Every man" do not mean every man, but every social man! And what is social? "To say that conduct shall be social is to introduce the assumption of equal freedom at once." Now is not this—apart from an incidental untruth—precisely equal to saying that the original proviso was a limitation? While the definition of society as a condition of equal freedom is gratifying as being an assurance that no great sacrifice of individual welfare is likely to be demanded by the ones who gave this definition, I will only say here that it is an ideal, not the known society. Where the idealist says that I am no man if not a social man, the actual societman says that I shall have practically no freedom to do as I will, but only as society wills. Am I yet safe with the idealists? No, because to him I am not a man, for lack of the motive which makes "society," and, even were I a non-aggressive man, he proposes to tax me. Take this second proviso of society from "To-Day": "Society is a result of men's treating each other in a way different from that in which they severally treat the rest of nature. The difference consists in each man's ceasing to appropriate the faculties of others, etc. There seems to be implied something of a mystic tie. A little further on "To-Day" speaks of "a consciousness of duty to respect the rights of others," and it makes this a mainstay of society. From this to collective aggression upon the individual cannot be a long step, I think.

Apparently no non-aggressive disposition is not enough to propitiate the social oracle. "To-Day," having "circumscribed" the meaning of the law of equal freedom, examines some of the "ultimate deductions" from it, and states this one: "Every non-aggressive social man has a free right to do as he wills." See how we are conditioned. But soon it appears that the others in the majority make free to do as they will contrary to his will. "To-Day" says: "It has been said to follow that to prevent a non-aggressive social man doing as he wills is unjust. But it must be remarked that no series of symphonies can make an affirmative proposition lead to a negative conclusion." Perhaps it has overlooked that in meaning there are three negatives in its latter proposition against one negative in the former, which leaves the propositions equal.

One more quotation without other comment than the suggestion that the careful review be extended to the propositions advanced by "social men": "When we come to advance propositions about such a complex as a social man, it becomes necessary to review his attributes very carefully. It is not convenient to attempt the review here; but assumptions as to the nature of social man will be gradually introduced as their joint relations to the environment are defined."

A viler judgment has seldom been passed upon a literary man than this of the New York "Nation" upon Walt Whitman, assuming a relation of cause and effect between the poet's celebration of the flesh and his long period of invalidism. It says: "Compare this prema of life, the triump of the poet, of life coarse and rank" with the old age of the drolister poets—with Bryant's eighty-four clean and wholesome years, with Whit's almost a life-long invalid, "the busy and useful when eighty-four years are too!" We have no wish to dwell upon the hatred and envy of any one, but where a man deliberately makes the personal test, and where the application of that test has for instance the condition of would be cowardly to shrink from its recognition. These words undoubtedly mean that Whitman's disease and death were due to debauchery. To appreciate the peculiarly monstrous character of the insinuation one needs to know that when the poet went to the war as a nurse, he was a perfect embodiment
of physical manhood, and that he returned with the disease which wrecked his life, contracted during his untiring devotion to the wounded soldiers. What really is his glory is exhibited as his shame. It required the hypocritical pen of the man who writes civil service reform editorials with one hand while trying to baffle policemen with the other to produce so foul a libel. It is lucky for E. L. Godkin and the New York Daily, that the author of "The Good Gray Poet" still living, would apply the "personal test" to the editor of the "Nation" without waiting for him to invite it.

A Poet of Nature.

Walt Whitman, the poet of Nature, has joined the unseen majority. The mysterious compact of forces which we term the human organism has in his case done it, a disease which was the death, of course, and took him. To himself indeed, perhaps, yes, and to us also, who remain and remember, he is not dead. A figure so great, so conspicuous, so picturesque, standing alone like a native mountain in the midst of the cityed plain of modern conventionality, can never die out from the memory of man.

Never, perhaps, since the days of Ossian, or of the author of "The Kobold," have there existed so many souls, so many voices, all who were so powerfully the root of rude, basic, barbaric Nature — or a man who so desired to be, and who so nearly succeeded in becoming, Nature in himself. With him — as he is brought down to the skull and seed of things, the first a principle, the second a nature, the primitive motives and passions — he only sings the very soul from which the human plant springs, but, with inspiring genuineness, the very essence of which that plant is fertilized. With what noble contempt for mean and meekness which the great and the greatly-enraptured have always shown, his words go to the birth of things, without shame or shame.

Even as he sings aloud that pleasure, that monopoly of the soul, he is Nature — is Nature, the trend, the more Nature we are permitted to share it.

The poets of ancient time, with their mere art, put us in their place, while we are permitted to be but poets.

In the conception of poetry Walt returns to ancient ideals. Poetry is Nature, the beauty, the true thing, the real thing, to be filled with religious earnestness. A poem is a great meaning, and a post one who sings of great meanings with positive intuition.

The voice of poetry is justice, reality, immortality. Divine instinct, breath of vision, the law of reason, health, ruddiness of body, with divinities of every kind — and these are not the same, but they are true and true.

The poems of words give you more than poems.

You give them to form yourself poems, your soul's poems, your soul's poems to the world to be, and to the world to be.

Then take the same voice, the same voice, the same voice, and the world.

The irregular rhythm of the wind and the waves is his model. Like Emerson, and that greatest of women-poets, Emily Dickinson, he is one of the windings who has created a voice that the heaves of Nature's remedy is rhythm, full of infinite, mysterious meaning, not a polished and rigid form, but perpetually varying, recurring pulsations.

Not so much as Ingersoll, who is a poet of the same school, he is truer, and infinitely more picturesque and sublime. He knew and felt the charm of the great magnificences — the deserts, oceans, snow-covered mountains, mountains, pools of days and weeks which he has consecrated to himself. He had no conception of Nature, that the individual is but a unit of Society. Remembering this, he continually found occasion to:

Yet utter the word Democratic, the word free, and the beautiful word, "Comrade," is forever on his lips.

And who but that should be the poet of communism?

Indeed, as with Ingersoll, friendship, warm, sunny, and genial, is the most charming characteristic of the man.

How tremendously helpful, healthful, and inspiring all this is to the sickened souljourner in modern conventionalism goes without saying. It is the like strong air of the high hills, the brine of ocean, or the strong light of sea or Oliver Schreiner's "Shimmery afternoon" in the desert.

Divine am I and out, and I make holy whatever I touch, or am touched from.

The scent of those great pines, and the earth that grew.

This idea, this church, this axe, this leaf and all the creeds.

I do not rush the day to vindicate myself or by understanding.

I see that the element that goes by the name of analogy, I reckon I shave no general beyond the level I plant my house by, after all.

I exist as I am — that is enough.

I do as I wish and what I wish, I exist content.

And if each and all be aware, I sit content.

The world is aware, and by far the largest to me, and that is myself.

With Walt one of his most constant and sublime thoughts was his unity and identity, one might almost say his equality with the universe.

We doubt but the beauty and the beauty of the world is heroic in every line of the world.

I do not doubt I am limitless — in vain I try to think how limitless.

Earth, my licentious! A care Sonolite intercites all.

To be this incredible God am I.

I have the idea of all, and all am, and believe in all.

Many in time — what is it eternally existent.

And this oneness of feeling is even greater toward humanity; he returns continually to the theme that he is to include all, embrace all, and himself with all.

In all he is one in spirit with Christ and Buddha, and even exists them in the eloquence and intensity of its expression. The "Neither do I condemn thee" is not equal to —

Not null, as no excuse to you. Not all the waters I will of thee, I will of thee.

To the right of what I am; to the right of what I am.

The sentiment of brotherhood has never been expressed with any such sense the way in which the brotherly acquaintance, the brotherly visitation to man becomes virtuous, just, wise, and manly. Walt seems never to have exactly comprehended this, and in his large charity it is the only bad thing of which he could ever make the slightest estimate.

On his right cheek I put the family lawn, And in my soul I swear, I will never deny him.

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