

*The Wasp*  
March 6, 2015

***Prattle***

Mr. Burnette G. Haskell is a gentleman who lives without work by preaching the dignity of labor. Under protection of the laws, he urges the abolition of law. He accumulates wealth by attacking the rights of property. He aspires to be, and to some extent is, a leader of industrial discontent, which is well enough; but, as all who lead it must do, he leads it toward anarchy, which is not so well. He would draw his followers from the Cave of Adullam, not to establish a reign of reason, but to promote a policy of revenge. He is a man of brains—not the coarse strong brains of a Kalloch, nor the coarse cunning brains of an O'Donnell—but his abilities have imperfectly served his ambition (like strong slaves who despise their master) for they have been to some extent directed by conscience, a fatal fault in him who would lead “the masses.” He appears now to have discovered the cause of his failure and has set about repairing his moral machinery by loosening all the screws, throwing off the ratchets and discarding the brakes.

Mr. Haskell was recently sent by his “constituents” to Seattle to report upon the riot. Of course they did not want the truth; that class of people will not have the truth unless it will serve their aim better than falsehood; and in that case they accept it with the cold reluctance of a hungry Jew succored by the humane efforts of a roast pig. Their investigator served them well and faithfully, and has made a long report of the facts as he was expected to find them. He found that Governor Squire “precipitated” the riot, wilfully and wantonly. He found that the persons killed and wounded were inoffensive citizens, peaceably doing their duty and assailed by a lawless mob. The offence of the first man shot was asking this mob what it was going to do with the Chinamen—an inquiry prompted, doubtless, by his deep solicitude for their safety. For this he was seized by the throat and then knocked down with a clubbed rifle. As he lay on the ground helpless, Law and Religion, in the persons of a judge and a minister of the gospel, “fired their rifles into his prostrate body, inflicting the death wounds.” Mr. Haskell does not add that they afterward devoured the carcass and got piercing drunk on the blood. He knows the strength of restraint: when he has exhausted his imagination he stops.

According to this truthful chronicler, during the time when Seattle was under military law “over two hundred white men who were poor were driven out of the city at the point of the bayonet,” “simply because they were poor and out of work.” This shows in Mr. Haskell a most regrettable delinquency of observation: the men were banished, not because they were poor and out of work, but because they were white. The officers of the Army have no prejudice against poverty and idleness, but the animosities of race burn in their bosoms with the wild, free flame of corn-cobs in a smoke-house. As for Mr. Haskell, having now moulted the last rag of respectability he may justly congratulate himself on his freedom from future censure. He has escaped criticism as an alligator escapes an over-taking steamboat—by getting beneath it.

A certain ex-Lieutenant of the Navy, Hight Graydon, has been giving the reporters that which in the loose locution of social unworthy is called “a fill.” This imaginative person assures these dry-land marines that he fires from a common sporting rifle hollow bullets containing a bursting charge of dynamite, with strangely disagreeable consequences to his target and great comfort to himself. He is not particular about the pattern of his gun—anything will do that has a hole through it endwise; the failure of all the thousands of earlier experimenters being obviously due to their fastidious discontent with plain and homely conditions. This bad man means to apply his “invention” to artillery, and wear away the rock of Gibraltar in half an hour by letting one of his big guns heave a few sighs against it. This, I suppose, depends on his ability to make a gun with a calibre equal to that of a reporter’s credulity; but you may fry me in lightning if that can be done.

The newest “fad” of the penologists is “indeterminate sentences”—that is to say, criminals are to be simply sent to prison, to be, like patients in a hospital, “discharged when cured.” This plan—which has the merit of Prison Director Hendricks’ approval—will work first rate if God will agree to act as the discharging officer. It is hardly likely, though, that he would accept the position: he has long been out of politics.

Apropos of prison reform, I observe that the new hospital of the San Quentin establishment is one of the most comfortable in the world. Indigent invalids unable to obtain proper medical treatment, and suffering the privations of an honest life, will do well to try the new sanitarium.

When honest men on beds of straw  
Lack medical assistance,  
And feel the tooth of famine gnaw,  
And winds that penetrate each flaw  
Won’t keep their distance,  
The ailing thief, his sulking maw,  
With dainty messes,  
And old Port humoured, licks his chops,  
Stained brown by healing draughts and drops  
(Champagne all unconsidered pops  
And effervesces)  
And with a smirking, smug haw-haw  
His “good opinion of the law”  
At last confesses.  
O pampered thief, your bliss were brief  
Had I the task of your relief  
As medical assister.  
Though ne’er you felt the halter draw  
You would the blister.

Just as the last man of us was convinced that the Supreme Court had forever dropped the Buckley contempt case, it gravely announces a “decision.” It had to acquit, but the seven justices made the brave showing they could without convicting—three for acquittal, three for conviction and one so evenly divided that the accused owes his discharge to “the benefit of the doubt.” The attitude of the Court may be expressed with mathematical accuracy thus:

For Acquittal . . . . . 3.50005

For Conviction . . . . . 3.49995

Majority for Acquittal . . . . . MYRICK

Some of the dangers of attempting to resume what one has given away are shown in a case recently on trial in London. It appears that an invalid gentleman named Bartlett gave his wife to his pastor, the Rev. Mr. Dyson, and found great gratification in contemplating their happiness. Unluckily for himself, however, he recovered his health and with it his covetous disposition, which prompted him to insist on the restoration of the *status quo ante*. It was therefore thought expedient to chloroform him, which was done by the wife with flawless success, and he sleeps in the valley. I have not observed the result of the trial, but both prisoners would naturally and rightly expect lenity—the one on account of his holy office, the other because she is a widow. On the part of the Crown, however, it might be contended that a wife being an inalienable chattel, the deceased had not legally parted with his right in her, and was but claiming his own. Moreover, though restored to health he was subject to a relapse, when doubtless he would again have placed his wife where she would do the most good. In any case, it was hardly right to chloroform him.

“A person, my dear,  
Is trying to clear  
The sand from the Sphinx,” he said.  
“I’m afraid, said she,  
“When he gets them free  
He will find them all stone dead.”  
“‘Them’ what?” he cried.  
“Them Sphinks,” she replied,  
And he thoughtfully rubbed his head.

The southern part of the State is exalting its voice in a stridulous clamor for the right to name the next Governor. To this demand San Francisco deigns no reply. She simply sits upon her seventeen hills, stretches forth her right hand and points in the direction of Rabel’s Tannery. Her index finger is strangely active, as with a living consciousness of its own. It quivers with an intense and meaning intelligence; it shoots forward with a visible growth, prolonging itself with a slow, pitiless persistence through the blue spaces of the political horizon. Over the hills, the plains, rivers, forests, villages, the awful digit holds its airy course unswerving, pushing its significant tip athwart the sky, irrestrainable, inevitable, implacable. With heads unhatted and suspended breath, with beating hearts and faces white, a nameless terror cowering in every breast, successive communities mark the menace of that dreadful apparition. At last it stops at the State Capital—stops within a foot of an illustrious Feature, prominent, hand-painted, beaconing the town—the Gubernatorial Nose. There it stays its portentous advance—there, levelled like a gun at Stoneman of Los Angeles. That is San Francisco’s answer to Southern California.

In last Sunday’s *Chronicle* I observe that in the Department of “Undertones” the writer has omitted his own verses and substituted those of a felon in the Wisconsin penitentiary. The change is not remarkable in point of style, for his own verse is distinctly felonious. Still, one likes to hear from all parts of the country, and the singer already convicted may spill himself through his throat with as fine and free melody as he who “warbles his native wood-notes wild” through inspiration of a golden hope.

In its features of violence the fight against the Chinese is growing too mean and dastardly for toleration. Even the preachers are taking a hand in it; and when a preacher "mixes in" a secular quarrel it is pretty certain to be an infernally mean quarrel. Much that has been done against the Chinese was unlawful, inexpedient and cowardly. It will not only delay for many years any effective measures for ridding ourselves of the objectionable element, but it all tends directly to bloodshed. The voice of the rifle will be heard in the land; the United States soldier will be pushing his sticker into all manner of places. People will be full of horizontal holes, and ranks of broad bootsoles will confront the horizon. My excellent readers, the first thing you know you will be lying across one another like jackstraws, and the interspaces will be filled with your females and young. The Chinese must go; that is right. But a lot of you fellows are saying that who won't be here when they start: you'll be sitting on the steps of the Great White Throne picking the lead out of your entrails. If you're not I'll swallow my leg.

(Source: Archive.org, <https://archive.org/stream/waspjanjune188616unse#page/n173/mode/1up>)