

San Francisco News Letter
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Confessions of a Weak-Minded Man

I am the most unfortunate of men. With correct natural instincts and an innate love of truth and goodness, my whole life has been a series of errors, whose monotony is relieved only by the most stupid crimes. So constant have been my blunders and so atrocious my iniquities, that my mind never a strong one—has almost lost its balance, and it is only by comparing myself with such members of our legislature as I chance to meet, that I can obtain a reasonable doubt of my insanity. Having finally, after a great deal of indecision, determined to withdraw from society, and pass the remainder of my existence in the seclusion of the Young Men's Christian Association, I have decided to publicly confess a few of my follies, that others may avoid them. I only ask that my real name—which is Phineas Tittle—and my reputation—which, like myself, is not hardy—may not be surrendered up to an outraged public.

If the thousands of my friends who will read this confession, could but know who makes it, what would be their amazement to learn that he whom they have been accustomed to regard as a model of honor is a liar and a slanderer. Humiliating acknowledgment! Lest I may not be believed—as indeed I don't deserve to be—I will give an instance in proof. I have frequently been heard mildly to assert—I always try to be mild, and hope I ever shall—that the daily press of our city is an altogether absurd affair. But since the impeachment of Mr. Johnson, my falsehood has become so painfully evident that I can no longer conceal it, even from myself. Certainly no one can read the learned treatises on impeachment as they appear in the editorial columns of our three leading dailies, and as for the next few years they will appear, without being convinced that they are very profound. They are *too* profound for my weak intellect; I require something plain like Emerson. And then when a leading journal announces in an editorial note that “it is now a well-recognized axiom in *political economy*, that the less a man knows and the more liquor he drinks the more determined he is to make this ‘a white man's government,’ ” is it not clear that the editor perfectly understands the meaning both of *axiom* and of *political economy*? And how can anyone who is absurd understand such things? This is only a single instance in which to the crime of falsehood I have added that of slander; and I am shocked to perceive to how small an extent I am truly penitent. Nor have I been uniformly honest. I have frequently stolen—not money, certainly, but what the owners have even less of—ideas. I am a drayman, and in the fits of anger to which I am unfortunately subject, I have often applied to my offending horse not only the ideas, but the very language, of the *Examiner* and the *Call*. Returning reason has always made me very much ashamed, and a fine by the Judge of the Police Court has usually stamped the disgrace indelibly in my memory. My mental and moral aberrations are truly deplorable. Among others I acknowledge to a total inability to properly respect the Board of Education, I am convinced that nothing short of a thorough course of treatment at Stockton, or a direct revelation from heaven, would enable me to comprehend how it is either efficient or decent. Now, I ask if this is not a most wretched state? Like Charley Stoddard—the only one of our domestic bards that the wreck of my faculties has given me the

power to appreciate—I “hesitate and hesitate.” I feel that I could willingly exchange places with either the Emperor Norton or Elder Knapp. I do not mean to imply that the latter gentleman is not a great and holy man. On the contrary I religiously believe he is; and I am the more pained that I cannot revere him as I should, because of my inability to make extraordinary mental efforts. The epithet of “Ecclesiastical blackguard,” which in a moment of passion I once applied to him, I hereby retract. But amid all this mental confusion there is, thank heaven, one faculty unimpaired. I mean the faculty of disbelieving in Horace Greeley, Geo, Francis Train, Wemyss Jobson, and other great men. In this one respect I do not see that I differ sufficiently from the rest of mankind to set up a plea of insanity.

(Source: California State Library, Sacramento, microfilm collection)