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*The Passing Show*

*A Record of Personal Opinion and Dissent*

The New York "Journal's" success in suffusing the thieving ice trust with a certain healthful glow unknown to the commodity in which it deals recalls and accentuates what was said by Mr. F. S. Monett, the former Attorney-General of Ohio. Speaking of restraint of criminal trusts, he said:

It needs no new government; it needs no political platform. The evil requires neither free silver nor gold standard, double tax nor single tax. It needs men to execute the laws that we have.

That is the entire truth in a nutshell. Laws do not execute themselves, however good they are. "Planks" in a party platform are idle lumber. Decisions of courts are valid in the cases that they decide, but worthless in any other, for they are so numerous and contradictory that any one of them can be confronted by a decision the other way. Wherever there is a prosperous criminal trust there is a degenerate community—a community which wrong cannot rouse and submission cannot shame. The natural and appointed prey of rascals is fools; they can digest no other diet. Fat geese make fat foxes, but in an eagle-cage Reynard would show his bones.

In calling up Senator Teller's resolution of sympathy with the South African "Republics" Senator Wellington on Monday last had the intelligence to explain that "their foe has been our foe, and their battle for the right is a repetition of our own." The war of our forefathers with the British—the "revolutionary war"—was definitively and specifically a war against "Taxation without Representation." Will Senator Wellington undertake to say that the Boers are fighting against that particular kind of oppression? I shall answer my own question: Senator Wellington is a brave man and I do not doubt that he will, but what does the honourable gentleman mean by "their foe" having been "our foe?" Does he think that King George the Third is prosecuting the war in South Africa? Does he hold that Lord North is still Prime Minister; that Clinton is campaigning in the Orange Free State "as was," and that Lord Cornwallis has crossed the Vaal? "Our" Foe! We had no foe in the revolutionary war: Not a mother's son of us was born. And every man Jack of our grandfather's foemen is as dead as Queen Anne. Does the honourable gentleman believe in hereditary identity, or has he merely confused political abstractions with living, breathing and responsible human beings? That is not an uncommon error: Ninety-nine men in a hundred are invincibly addicted to it. And the hundredth man, exalted to an immeasurable intellectual altitude above his fellows, is gifted by the Adversary of Sense with the fool notion that living men should be held responsible for the sins of their dead and damned ancestors. We are all Wellingtons of one kind and another—all turkey-cocking in the pride of an imaginary intelligence. But God sees us and will eventually cast us all into Kansas.

In affirming the decision of the Kentucky Court of Appeals in the matter of Mr. Taylor's right to be governor, the Supreme Court of the United States signified its conviction that public office is not property. That may be good law or bad—that depends on what one's interests are; but it simplifies matters notably. The venerable theory that public office is private property has from the foundation of this government generated quarrels as to whose private property a certain office may be—whether it belongs to the man holding it or whether he holds it in trust for the man who got it for him. It is to be hoped that we shall have no more of these unseemly contentions among the great and good; the decision has narrowed down the ground of profitable dispute to the question: To whom does the office-holder belong?

The new theory of office will naturally work some hardships among the blameless. For example, Mr. Clark of Montana would have suffered severely from it if he had not already suffered severely from a committee of the Senate. It would, I think, be difficult to make that worthy gentleman understand that he cannot own what he purchased at a price which emptied the coffers of his reputation and burdened the exchequer of his conscience with an insupportable interest charge of excuses.

*There seems to be on each committee some sworn friend of the administration who can be relied upon to smother any piece of legislation which does not meet with the approval of the administration.*—Senator Pettus.

What would the Senator be pleased to have? A new Heaven and a new Earth? A new deal in human nature? A Senate of angels in whose committees the still small voice of justice and the still smaller voice of generosity would charm away all selfish thoughts, like music in a dream? Senator Pettus is not very original. The accusation that he makes is always made; the indignation that he feels is the regular minority indignation, a fire that is never extinguished. The fact that in an administration Senate the personnel of the committees is determined with a main reference to fortification of the majority may be irrelevant, but to hold it a moment in mind will not harm the feeblest intellect. That is the sole objection to mentioning it.

I have not the happiness to understand all this clamor against “government by injunction.” The argument is that if the law forbids something to be done and sets a penalty for doing it that is enough. By forbidding it himself a judge may make the doing it a crime with a different name and differently punishable. But consider: He cannot forbid what was not already forbidden; cannot make a crime of what was not already a crime. How, then, can his injunction harm one who obeys the law? Of what importance is it to a good citizen what would happen to him if he were a bad citizen? If I am not intending to commit a crime I do not care how many times I am warned not to commit it, nor how many kinds of penalties attached to its commission. If objection is to be made, let it come from him who wishes to commit it, or wishes that others may. And in my judgement that is the man who does make all the fuss. I challenge any man to cite an instance of an injunction forbidding anything that ought to be done.

The clamor against “government by injunction” bears a strong familiar likeness to that against running mail cars on street railways and it comes from the same sources of sound. The objection to the mail cars is that they are a device of the Tyrant Capitalist for protection of the roads in times of “labor troubles.” Protection from what? Destruction by strikers and mobs. Well, then, ought not property to be protected? Is it already an accepted principle that in a disagreement between employer and employee the latter ought to wreck the property of the former? There is not a labor union nor newspaper in the country that has the frankness to advocate any such principle openly, seriously, directly. And there is no a well-

known labor leader or writer who, over his own name clearly, truthfully, in good faith and without evasion, will answer this crucial question: What do the mail cars prevent which ought to be done? I have asked that question a hundred times and have never got an answer. It is up to you, Mr. Samuel Gompers. It is up to you, Mr. John Swinton. Of course these remarks are suggested by three weeks of riot, murder and general disorder in St. Louis. A good deal of shooting has been done there, but not a bullet appears to have been put where it would do the least harm—that is to say in the mortal part of the Mayor. The executive head of a city who cannot in three weeks put an end to such scenes as have disgraced St. Louis, discredited popular government and begotten in thoughtful men a more or less conscious longing for the more primitive institutions of the Stone Age is a gelatinous torpidarian in whom death would make no material change and whose most needful epitaph would be: “It was once alive.”

The “Invincible” Krugeroocracy appears to have gone down “all of a heap” and we shall now see how much there was in the customary assurance that “the Boers will never, never submit!” They will submit, all right, and in a few years become good and contented British colonists in the enjoyment of the first liberty that they have ever known—the liberty which is enjoyed by all British subjects except the Irish, and which the Irish can have by submission. There will be no “perpetual guerrilla warfare,” no “dying in the last ditch,” no nonsense. It is thought, though, that Dr. Jordan may hold out for a considerable time.

The worthy French gentlemen doing business in this inhospitable hemisphere as the Panama Canal Company are encountering enough engineering difficulties to daunt the stoutest heart. They may have devised a practical plan to dam the Chagres River, but they have not found a way sufficiently to dam the revolutionary government of Colombia.

The Secretary of the Interior having failed in his negotiations for the purchase of Calaveras Grove from the thrifty Duluth whalebacker, a new bill has to be put through Congress authorizing condemnation. That authorization ought to have been attached to the other bill. Suggestions to that effect were made in the Senate by Mr. Hoar. But Mr. Perkins, with characteristic feebleness, would not take the awful responsibility of amending anything that came from the fair hands of the California Club. Nobody insisted, and as a consequence the matter is just where it was in the beginning—nothing accomplished toward saving the trees. I am now receiving many letters from California asking me to assist in the scheme of making a government reservation of the “big basin” in the Santa Cruz mountains. I really do not carry Congress in my pocket, and if I did should not like to carry anything else here that had value, but I will assist on one condition: The women shall have nothing to do with the matter—and that bars out Perkins. Of course, nothing can, in any event, be done during this expiring session. At a time when Congress should be making its peace with heaven it would be wicked to draw away its thoughts to Santa Cruz County. Instead of planning condemnation proceedings it should be studying how to escape them.

It is pleasing to know that solar eclipses are to remain infrequent, despite the flattering attentions bestowed upon this last one. That cheerful phenomenon appears to have bereft us of sense altogether—whence I infer that, in production of lunacy, the black side of the moon is far and away superior to the bright side. If we had a solar eclipse every few days we should indubitably go stark, staring mad, every mother’s son of us, and should have to alter the old common-law maxim to “Every man’s house is his asylum.”

What is the matter with us, anyhow? If the dark side of the moon, when that tricky orb gets between us and the light, does not give off some peculiar idiotizing emanation, how are we to explain and excuse this fantastic self-deception of an entire people? What else

prompted us to make spectacular extravaganzas of ourselves and what is persuading us to continue the performance? To what else is due this dire output of insufferable stuff—columns and columns of it in the newspapers—about the “awe-inspiring spectacle” and the wonders of its attendant incidents: the “uncanny light,” the “strange feeling in the air,” the “unfamiliar quality of sounds,” the apprehensive horse, the rattled dog and all the rest of it?

All these were purely subjective phenomena. There was nothing in nature corresponding to them nor in any way answering to the perfervid descriptions. They were mere fictions—feats of imagination of persons in whom imagination, somewhat impaired by the rust of inactivity, is a faculty disobedient to reason and insurgent against the senses. The only thing “out the common” that occurred last Monday was the eclipse, just the visible transit of the moon across the face of the sun and a consequent dimming of his light, precisely, to the naked eye, like that which takes place every clear evening when he goes below the horizon.

I did not see that eclipse from a point within the belt of totality, but have seen others from that coign of vantage and would not go from one side of a street to the other side to see a thousand. Nor, except an astronomer on business bent, would anyone who is sufficiently familiar with the movements of the heavenly bodies, which he has always before his eyes, not habitually to conceive them as points and discs moving on a concave surface. That is not only obvious to observation, but proved by their lively interest in anything, which by disturbing that peasant conception, gives them a novel sensation—which, after all, is distinctly inferior to a nice, lasting drunk.

To an astronomer with his instruments a solar eclipse is a thing of legitimate and rational interest. It teaches him a good deal—mostly not worth knowing. With his intelligent eye at the hither end of a telescope he sees many wonderful things—mostly optical illusions. But the unassisted eye sees nothing but a mighty poor show to which a free ticket were exorbitant. The imagination does the rest; and the average man’s imagination gets so little exercise that when turned loose it executes the solemn pranks of a gamboling cow.

There is an old anecdote about an Englishman who, when shown Niagara, manifested no emotion.

“Don’t you see anything wonderful,” he was asked, “in that great body of water rolling majestically over a great precipice?”

He looked again and said: “What’s to prevent it?”

Was he a fool—a stolid dolt? That is what the anecdote implies, but I think not. He was an intelligent person, who did not need his eyes to see things. He had a creative imagination which had discounted the spectacle; the cataract had nothing new to show him. I like him.