

THE AWAKENING MIDDLE CLASS

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THE ancient battle cry of the Templars was "God and my right." If this could have come down through the ages as the battle cry of mankind many evils might have been prevented, for he who contemplates God with His compromises and concessions between contending forces in nature would have been inevitably impressed with the great truth that "my right" is not a fixed, definite and unbending privilege to be, to think and to do what I please. "My right" is rather my duty to so adjust my aims and my efforts as to produce harmony in civil society.

Humanity, striving for higher and better things, particularly as exemplified among English-speaking peoples, soon clipped the Templars' motto into just "my right." The King who foolishly thought he ruled by right divine and that he could do no wrong interpreted "my right" to mean "my will" and regarded all other forces of life and society as subservient thereto.

Such a definition of "my right" inevitably produced friction, such friction that at Runnymede the barons wrested the great charter of English liberty from their overlord. And yet they learned but little. The battle cry was still "my right," and they assumed that all the other wishes of mankind were held in bondage to their own; and thus the laws were largely made for themselves, incidentally for others.

With the printing press, knowledge came, and the so-called great middle class of the world, more especially the business man, took charge of the conduct of human affairs through legislative bodies. And still wisdom lingered and still the cry was "my right."

Another, and the greatest of evils in all the history of humankind, has taken place: the man who thinks he works exclusively with his hands, but who, if he stopped to consider would realize that his hands are only doing what his brain lays out for him to do, has marched upon the scene of government.

Does wisdom still linger and is the old cry of "my right" again to be exemplified or attempted to be exemplified by these men taking into their hands the machinery of government and fixing by man-made laws the political, social and economic conditions of the world? Is it



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to be a repetition of the old experience of humankind,—"my right," regardless of the other fellow?

Here and there in the long process of the ages there has been a gleam of light from individuals and from groups of men, and in 1776 a theoretical sun arose, called the Declaration of Independence, to shed its light upon the world. Is it to prove to be a pale, anaemic sun, or is it to be a glowing, refulgent, warming and earth-reviving source of light and heat and power?

The long, long fight from John at Runnymede to Haig and Pershing in Flanders and in France seems to have been fought under the battle cry "my right," and "my right" seems always to have been to seize the instruments of power and to wield them regardless of my duty and regardless of the rights of others.

If in my own little political or social

life I had ever sought or defended legislative enactment for myself or for any particular group of my fellow-countrymen, then I ought to be estopped from making this inquiry: Has not the hour struck upon the dial of time when the great mission of English-speaking peoples and, more particularly, the great mission of the American, is to teach and to live upon the principle of the mutual duties of men toward each other and of organized society toward all its members?

No defense can be made of the past, seamed, scarred, mutilated and blackened by special legislation as it has been. What is to be said of the laws of government which, defining crime, declare that of two men committing crimes one shall by the law be deemed guilty and the other by the selfsame law be held innocent? What sort of a democratic brain is it that hunts a moonshiner to

his lair, arrests, convicts and incarcerates him in a Federal prison, and elects to the United States Senate the man who buys his product?

Special legislation must necessarily come so long as the old cry of "my right" remains the battle cry of the Republic and so long as men are recognized as good citizens, at the same time separating themselves and their interests from the common weal.

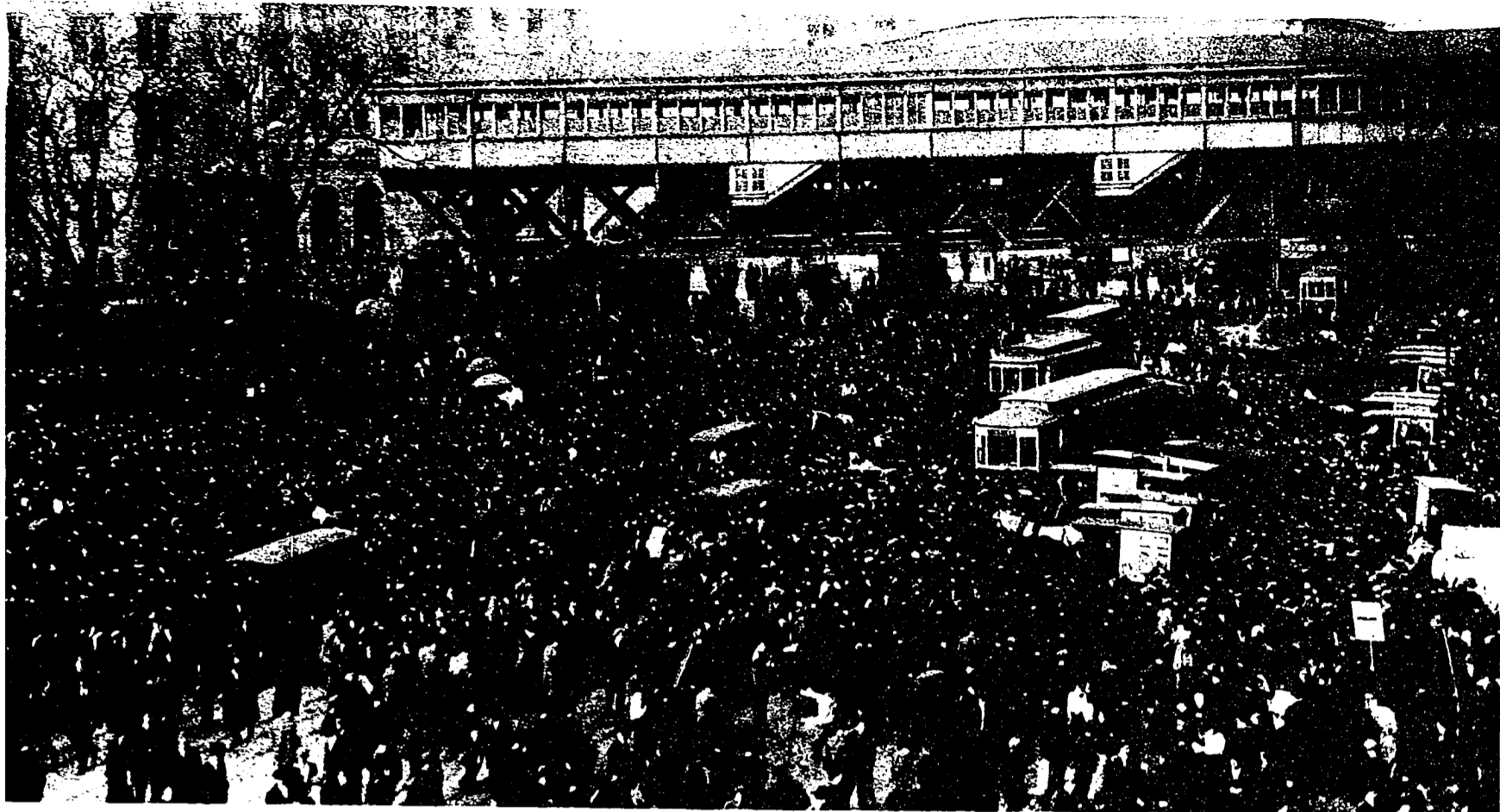
I know what hot blood can do. I know how self-defense can rapidly degenerate into willful murder. I can thoroughly appreciate how the long, long years of injustice have warped their judgment and made vindictive many of our citizenry. I can even sympathize with those who, having been the victims of special legislation, declare that now is the time to pay back the grievances they have suffered in legislative coin of like mintage.

But there are many in this Republic—I think a majority—who have never voted for any special privilege to any man or set of men; who, from the first moment of their conscious political and social life, have been convinced that the never-ending contest of class against class, of prejudice against prejudice, of right against right is the most inimical thing in the life of the State.

Have we learned anything out of the great war through which we have just passed? Have we only thrown off a military autocracy to take up and countenance an autocracy of either wealth or poverty? Is there enough calm and deliberate judgment and courage in the Republic to take from Independence Hall the Declaration and write it upon the life and conduct of the Republic?

Have not twenty centuries of Christian civilization yet taught, not as a mere catchword but as the moving force of life, that no man has a right without having a duty superimposed upon that right?

Are we so blind, so childish, so impotent as to dream that, if either individually or by association we convince ourselves that we have certain rights and that governments are ordained among men, we can get hold of the government, to assure us of those rights, regardless of their effect upon our fellow-men? If so, instead of peace on earth to men of good-will, out of this war there will sim-



Any Day, Every Day, with the "Middle Class" on Nassau Street, Probably the Most Continuously Crowded Thoroughfare Used by New York's Downtown Clerks, Professional Men, and Other Unorganized Workers.

ply proceed chaos and disorder, murder and rapine in society.

I am an optimist. I have a blind yet sure belief that legislative enactments will be overturned and overturned until only the right shall rule in the world, and I have a blind belief that the mysterious workings of conscience will affect the private and individual life of the citizen until a like result will be obtained in his social and economic relations with his fellow-men.

Who is there that dare deny that right and duty are the twin hand-maidens who minister to every thinking man? Who is there that can dispute that the Republic will not long remain the Republic which the Fathers thought they founded if contending classes are to continually clamor for their rights and to be utterly oblivious of their duties?

Are not men well assured that in the interests of the common good and in the preservation of an individualistic Republic, more and more the individual citizen must consent to modify and lessen what he calls his right when by so doing he can contribute to the welfare and happiness of his fellow-men? And is not he a foolish man who seeks to alter this immutable law of God by legislative enactment of the social conduct? And sooner or later will he not find himself an outcast?

Human nature is very human. Many men will gladly do by advice, admonition and reproof things which, if enacted into

law, they will bitterly resist. The never-ending quarrels between capital and labor are getting nowhere, and the reason is as plain as a pikestaff—each thinks of itself as a class; each raises its battle cry "my right"; each stands and glares at the other; each knocks at the door of Congress, importuning, advising, suggesting and threatening; each takes advantage of the weakness and frailty of legislators.

When is there to be a real, mutual partnership between these contending forces, a partnership not of money and of hands, not of dividends and of wages, but a partnership of confidence, respect, esteem and mutual help?

When will the employer open his factory, not exclusively for profits but also because he loves to see what his fellow-men can do and because he feels that it is his duty to give his fellow-men a chance in this great Republic? And when will the employe do his work because he loves to see his finished product and because he has faith that out of their joint relationship peace, prosperity and good order will come to the State?

It is a sad commentary upon our civilization, and upon the freedom which we have and which we enjoy, if the sons of God, garbed in human flesh, have become so obsessed with their individual rights that they are not willing to stop and consider their duty to their fellow-men and, having seen it, lack the courage to discharge it.

Many who have been unjustly oppressed by legislation in the past are going to be very slow to consent to a change of the system. But the old methods of legislation must stop, or the Republic must die. The war, ostensibly if not really, wiped out for us the political, hyphenated American; the war will have been in vain if it shall not also have wiped out for us the hyphenated, economic American, and has not taught us that, from him who has most to him who has least, as the days go by, individual right will grow less and individual duty will grow larger.

How many millions of times has it been declared upon the stump that this was a Government of equal and exact justice for all men and special privileges for none!

It is not needful for you to go back and point out to me the black record of legislation which discloses this too often to have been the perfervid oratory of a political campaign. It is not needful for you to show that it has not been kept in substance or in spirit. Do not search the record and flaunt in my face the innumerable instances of special privileges granted in the Republic.

I do not like the word "class." It savors too much of monarchical government—yet it expresses better than any other word certain real conditions in American life.

There is a great middle class in America who have had nothing to do with

these special privileges otherwise than that they happened to live in the Republic when they were granted. They are not organized so as to be heard in the halls of Congress. They constitute the backbone of the Republic. They do not want to form themselves into an organization, but they are rapidly coming together, and it will not be long, unless the plain truth is seen and acted upon in business and in legislation, until they, too, will be hammering at the doors of Congress, saying, "We, too, have some rights in this Republic for which we have lived and labored and which we love."

They, too, will say to legislative bodies, "If you do not have courage enough to legislate exclusively for the American people, then you are going to legislate for us or out you go and we'll put somebody else in who will." They are going to speak in unison, declaring: "We prefer to be just plain Americans who ask nothing but justice for our fellow-men in the same measure that justice is meted out to us—but unless the clamor for special legislation to enforce individual or class rights ceases, we, too, are going to be a class demanding to be heard and cared for." And they are going to say in the social, economic life of the Republic, "Right and duty walk side by side in every calling, and he, whether rich or poor, who does not hear and listen to both voices, shall be for us a social outcast."



Photos by E. Levick.

An Extraordinary Turn-Out of the "Middle Class"—Throng Roundabout the Brooklyn Bridge Entrance Augmented by Baseball Bulletin Fans and Spectators at a Recent Function in City Hall Park in Honor of a Distinguished Visitor.