

from The Public

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND MORAL TRUTH.

Closing speech at the "Progress and Poverty" dinner. Hotel Astor, New York city, January 24, 1905, delivered extemporaneously by William J. Bryan in response to the toast, "Equal Opportunity." Stenographically reported under the direction of the committee.

I esteem it a great privilege to be here. I do not know when I have attended a meeting where the atmosphere seemed to so pulsate with moral enthusiasm. It is well for us to meet and to carry away the inspiration of such an occasion. My only regret is that, as I look over this audience, I am compelled to face it without the presence of one who has been with me in all my work. I never see others enjoying an occasion like this with their wives without feeling lonesome. And if I linger longer than farmers usually linger in the evening, I can excuse it as a man once excused his tardy return to his wife. I think he was a New Yorker and stuttered, but I shall not imitate him. He came home at a late hour and his wife asked him why he was so late, and he told her that when she was not with him he only enjoyed himself half as much and it took him twice as long.

I am going to avail myself of the generosity of the toastmaster, and treat my subject as a preacher once treated his text. He announced his text, and added that there was a great deal more outside of his text than inside of it. And I am going to speak more outside of my subject to-night than inside of it.

I will simply say this on the subject of "Equal Opportunity"—that those who deny the right of children born into this world to equal opportunity ought to be prepared to give some defense for the inequality. I am not prepared to give any such defense. I would not know upon what ground to place it. If I were to look at it from a selfish standpoint, from the standpoint of the parent, I would have to argue from the side of equal opportunity. It does not require a farsighted person to recognize that the parent who leaves to his child equal opportunity leaves him the richest inheritance that parent can leave to child.

What if he leave wealth, however great the amount? In the first place, wealth is not

always a blessing to a child. I may say that great wealth has more often been a curse than a blessing, but if wealth were always a blessing, who of us can guarantee either that that wealth will remain, or that, the child will well employ it? Wealth takes the wings of the morning and flies away. It is sometimes said that there are not more than three generations between shirt sleeves and shirt sleeves. One generation creates the wealth, another spends it, the third needs it and must go to work again.

I know of nothing that can descend from generation to generation of so great value as equal opportunity, and a government that protects its citizens in the enjoyment of life and liberty and in the pursuit of happiness, and guarantees to each citizen a just share of the proceeds of his own toil.

But, my friends, I am impressed by the spirit of this meeting, and I want to speak on something outside of this subject. It has been a source of instruction to me to hear what has been said tonight. I am in distinguished company. The greatest day of my life was the day, a little more than a year ago, that I spent in the country home of Tolstoy. There were two Americans of whom he spoke to me. The son of one sits at my left; the son of the other sits at my right. He spoke in the highest terms of Henry George, and indorsed his economic theories, and he read to me something that he was just preparing, a preface to a life of the elder Garrison. And it is an interesting incident of this occasion that these two men, whose names were on the lips of the great apostle of love, should be represented in their descendants at this board tonight.

It is interesting to me also to meet for the first time one of the great poets of to-day, who has so mingled morality with beautiful language that his songs have touched the conscience of hundreds and thousands, aye, millions of people of this country and of other countries. It is a notable thing that at this board, with the son of Henry George and the son of William Lloyd Garrison, should be Edwin Markham.

And, my friends, I might speak of others here tonight. In the newspaper field, I have no more congenial friend than the gentleman who has just taken his seat [Mr. Post], and who has made his paper an economic bible with its readers.

My friends, it has been said that it marks an epoch in history when God lets loose a thinker in the world. And such was Henry George, for it is also true that there is no

great thought, as Carlyle said, that has not back of it a great heart. And the greatness of Henry George's thought was in Henry George's heart. And it was that heart that gave him courage to venture—the splendid courage to venture his thought upon the world.

I was interested in hearing read by his son tonight that letter of Henry George's to his father, in which he spoke with such confidence of the ultimate acceptance of his book.

And, as he labored, willing to be lost, willing to suffer, labored because he felt that he had a message to give, I could not help thinking of the language of Wendell Phillips, who said: "How prudently most men sink into nameless graves, while now and then a few forget themselves into immortality."

He was willing to forget himself; he was willing to undergo trial. He felt that he had something to say.

And, my friends, this brings me to what seems to me to be the dominant thought of today, and that is that the moral questions involved in the great problems of government and society are to-day attracting attention as they have not before. You have heard tonight reference made to the manner in which moral truths have touched the people. It is true. Nothing is permanent that does not involve some moral, principle. Beneath every great economic question is a moral question, and the question is never settled until the moral issue is determined and passed upon.

Man is a threefold being. Body, head and heart has he. We find some who give all their time to the body, some who give more emphasis than they should to the mind, but the well-rounded man recognizes that all three are necessary. But, of the three, the heart is the controlling one.

My friends, we sometimes have family gatherings, and when one lives to a ripe old age, he often gathers about him in his declining years a score, threescore or possibly a hundred, who can trace their ancestry to him. His blood, flows in their veins. We have great institutions of learning, at the head of which stand great intellectual teachers; and as commencement occasions recur the graduates come back, and sometimes these great teachers are able to number among their intellectual children

thousands and tens of thousands. But, my friends, the heart enables us to come into contact with multitudes, aye, with millions.

Those who have the same sympathies, whose hearts vibrate to the same great causes, are akin, and often closer akin than those who hold fellowship in the same institution or are of the same flesh, and blood.

And¹ you who here to-night join in the celebration of this occasion, and in doing honor to the name of Henry George, are bound to him, not by ties of blood or ties of brain, but by ties of heart and sympathy.

It has been well said by Mr. Markham that the best monument that can be reared is not the monument of stone— it crumbles; not the monument of bronze—it decays; but the monument of deeds. I am going to go further than that. I am going to say that the heart has made the most wonderful achievements of anything that we know.

In this generation we have great prosperity, great material advance. In this generation we have seen wonderful developments in inventions. We think it a wonderful thing that a man can stand by the side of a telegraph instrument, and, by means of the electric current, talk to people 10,000 miles away; and, more wonderful still, we have found that we can talk without the aid of a wire.

But the achievements of the heart are more wonderful. The heart that is full of love for its fellows, the heart that yearns to do some great good, the heart that puts into operation some movement for the uplifting of the human race, will speak to hearts that will beat 10,000 years after all our hearts are still. And that is more wonderful than talking to people 10,000 miles away.

They can tell us how far it is from the farthest star to the earth, but no human being has yet been able to calculate the infinite influence for good of one kind word or of one kind act. Who, then, can calculate the influence for good of a great heart that turns the hearts of thousands to a great moral principle in this world.

I fear the plutocracy of wealth, I respect the aristocracy of learning, but I thank God⁴ for the democracy of the heart.

If you go into cemeteries you will find that there are occasional monuments reared to the memory of the dead, and they generally vary in size and beauty, according to the value of the estate left. Sometimes we find a monument that is reared by grateful hearts to one whom the world calls great. But of all the countless millions of the human race, how many will be remembered 100 years after they are dead by any monument that marks their resting place?

I am glad that the Creator, as infinite in love as in power, has made it possible for the humblest human being, if inspired by noble purpose and filled with a holy zeal—possible for the humblest citizen in all this land to rear for himself a monument that will endure when all the monuments raised by human hands have utterly disappeared.

And I believe I can see that we are entering upon a new era. There is to be a revival of the spirit of brotherly love. I think I can see it in all lands. We see it in this land. We see it in

European countries. And nowhere, I think, my friends, have I seen a clearer evidence of it than in the home of Tolstoy. Tolstoy today has a name known in every land; and yet it is only 29 years since the change came in Tolstoy's life. We today celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of "Progress and Poverty." It was only about four years before that that Tolstoy turned from a life of ambition and worldliness to a life of devotion to the public weal, and he says that he never found in society or in literature any such reward as he has found since he has been trying to give himself to the human race. He says that man does not understand the purpose of life until he understands that he is not put here to find happiness for himself, but to devote himself to the welfare of others. His idea of life is a spring that pours forth constantly, not asking where the water goes, satisfied only that it shall flow continuously.

And, my friends, this man's love is the inspiring motive of his life. And it is love that prompts us all to do whatever we do that is good. It was love that made Henry George what he was. It was love for struggling humanity that made him seek the cause of poverty and distress. It was love for struggling humanity that made him search out the cause and the remedy for these things. Whether he has found all thnt

can be found, whether he has presented that which is true, with nothing of alloy, time alone must tell. But that he has touched the conscience of the world the world will now admit. And that he has touched it because he has loved the world, no one will dare to deny. And, my friends, he has found the secret—the secret that has been found so often, the secret that explains why so many, throughout the history of the world, have attached themselves to the world; he has found the secret that we love those who first love us. It is history. It has been true in the past. It is true now. It will be true. And you who gather here to-night represent that awakened conscience to which I look for the regeneration of this nation and of this world. And I feel that I have been helped by coming into contact with your courage, here in this great city—such a striking protest to things that you find about you.

Some one said to me last night: "Is it not strange that a man like Tolstoy lives in a country like Russia?" Not strange at all. It takes a country like Russia to produce a man like Tolstoy. Nowhere can the evil of force and violence be so well understood as in Russia. Did not Henry George's son tell us that it was in New York, where the extremes are so wide between the rich and the poor, that Henry George first began to think of this? Is it not the very aggravation of evil that calls attention to the condition and at last brings a remedy? My friends, I didn't know that there were so many righteous in this city. You cannot tell what you can do. No one can measure the good that he can do. It is not given to mortals to estimate the good they can do. And no man does much good who ever tries to keep track of the good that he does. A man who does much good is too busy to keep a book account of what he does.

But you cannot tell what good you may do. How little could Henry George tell how many would read his book? How little can Mr. Markham tell how many spirits will be roused from sleep by the pungent questions he has put. How can anyone tell what he will awaken in the mind of another by his word or deed?

We have assembled here tonight. We have listened to these things, and they go forth through the press. You cannot tell what good they will do. But you do know that nothing spoken for the truth, nothing done for righteousness, is spoken or done without avail.

Last summer I was in Arizona, and I stood on the brink of that mighty chasm, the Grand Canyon, and looked at the little brook that was winding its way almost a mile

below. And when I went down to the stream I found that, the walls bore the evidences of the rush of mighty waters; and I couldn't help thinking or wondering what was the volume of water that had passed in all the ages between these walls. And as I thought of the vast volume of it, I thought that every drop of it had left its impress there; that every drop was necessary to make that chasm what it is today.

And so, my friends, the aid of every one of us is necessary to make up the grand total of the reform work of this world. It may seem little; it is little; what each one does is small, but it takes the work of all to do the work that God has for us to do.

I go from this meeting encouraged by what I have heard. I go with my heart, I think, stronger for the work that lies before us. I go with my hope increased for the final triumph of the right; and, because I have been helped, I feel grateful for the opportunity that you have given me to join with you in doing reverence to the memory of one of the great men of this world, and in helping, as far as I can, to speed the work that is going to unite us all in the bond of sympathy, and make us seek a solution of every question that will rest upon justice between man and man.