

# The Egotist

THE EGOTIST is a "born leader of men." He aspires to do—mostly us. He loves to show our errors. He longs to set us right. He would stay our faltering feet in the paths of rectitude. And fundamentally, he never knows what he is talking about. He does not know because, blinded by his egotism, he imagines he knows it already. Self-complacent, he is above change. Self-righteous, he requires no condition. He does not need to study a matter. He knows it by intuition. He is above the "common herd." He pities them; he abuses them; he castigates them; he marvels at their ignorance. The while himself is ignorant as they, and in some respects more pitiable.

Usually he has a soft heart for abstract man; a long head for the "main chance," a tender regard for himself. The failure of the "crowd" to recognize his "truth" he ascribes to obtuseness. Brought up against a problem himself he hides behind the plea of a "busy life with no opportunity." Forced to admit the workers have no opportunity, he hedges under his parables of the lazy; the drunkard; the gambler and the slacker. Commonly he regards the toiling masses as an indolent bunch, dullard and unenterprising; without ability and invention. All told, he looks upon himself admiringly. Like Goldsmith's schoolmaster—"Still the wonder grew, that one small head could carry all he knew." And he never sees the comedy—or the tragedy—of it all.

Were he as original as he imagines himself to be, he might afford a momentary entertainment. As it is, he bores one like a sermon. And like a sermon, there are but two ways to bear the infliction—to fall asleep, or by proxy. But if the infliction steals upon us unawares, we can but fall back on wine, or Emerson, or Longfellow, and "know how great a thing it is, to suffer and be strong." For certainly it imposes suffering.

It would be superfluous, perhaps, to point out that the evils of society are the natural progeny of the organization of society. That its economic absurdities and antagonisms are the certainties of Capitalist development. That the inability of man to share in social progress is due to Capitalist property in the means of life. That social prosperity cannot exist concomitantly with class-rule. That the failure of man is not the magnitude of sloth, but the negation of law. And that no matter how diligent and earnest man may be, the private ownership of industry usurps his reward and prevents the common harvesting of social success. But superfluous or not, we state the case in the hope that it may pierce the fatuity of egoism, and prove a rankling barb in its vanity. For egotism is but the vanity of self. And in its present historic setting, self is but—Capitalist phantasia. The romantic psychology of "success," bourgeois apotheosis of activity. To be up and doing, to rustle up a job, to promote opportunity, to "get ahead," to take advantage of circumstances, to be optimistic, to have faith in the future, to hush the "whisper of death." That is the egotist viewpoint. It is also the ethic of Capital. And it is—slavery. To do "justly" and escape the judgment. Punk!

Egotism and bigotry have this in common—they cannot see a contradiction in terms. To them there is nothing incongruous in a square circle; a divine world; an infinite mind; or in ordinary mundane affairs; a human government; an intelligent "faith" of a conscientious financier. The one is impervious to contradiction; the other is oblivious to it. To them the common things of life—which are parallel organs of forces—are petrified "eternities." Not seeing in them the majesty of monistic unity, they cannot see in the wonder of their intricate interactions, the promise and herald of social harmony in this our only world of living men and fluent reality. Like the ancient land-wise, "fixity of tenure" is their creed. Condition is immaterial, relatively unangular, circumstance undynamic. If there is movement in society it is the circle of "eternal justice." If there is differentiation in status, it is shiftless and thriftless unambitiousness. If society is torn

asunder with deepening antagonisms it is the static of "human nature" which, like the laws of the Medes, changeth not. They juggle with evolution and creation in the same way as the ecclesiastical invertebrata juggle with science and religion; or as henchman science conjures with truth and the "unknown." And, in the end, they stand a-wondering before the problems of their deep confusion, as primitive man grovelled in awe before the mysteries of his animistic phantasies.

To Socialists the explanation of those things is simple enough and obvious enough. But simple only because Socialists, like the ancient Greeks, look the "gods" full in the face. That is, they accept no authority but unchallengeable fact, whether or not the fact promotes desire. But prejudice and tradition refuse to uncover their "souls." They tremble before the darkness of the end, and the possible chaos of social transition, and, because of their years, are hostile to omnipotent fact. As Haeckel phrases it, "they wish to be deceived." Unfortunately, in that "wish" is the substance of slavery, the material for the infinite diversity of social conflict; of confusionist schemes and cures and alleviations for the manifold evils of primary social miscomprehension. Only in the perception and acceptance of fact is the triumph of human life, and—come it as it may—social society.

Thus, to be a "leader of men" we must first have a society of men. Not a harlotry of bondage. A society, that is, where political freedom has given place to economic freedom. Then, when the social means of life are socially secure and undeniable, when life is not one long harassment of toil, uncertainty and disillusionment, when opportunity and culture are the prerogatives of society, then the "leader of men" shall be no hiring scribe or political bondsman, no industrial dictator or radical visionary. He will be the exponent of monistic unity, and his following will be men, appreciative of fact, nurtured on reality, cogent with logic of experience and critical with social understanding. In such a society leadership shall be real. For it will be the wisdom of reality. In such a society egotism will no longer allure with golden palaver. For it will be cut off from its sources of sustenance—confusion of terms and misinterpretation of fact.

To be anything, or do anything, or possess a philosophy of life which can meet the demands of life and satisfy its questionings, the great ego must be rigorously subordinated. The deeper implication of Socialism is humility. Not the false abasement of creeds—which is mainly political subterfuge (or, at its best, fantastic idealism); nor the scientific littleness of classic "finitism"—a sort of hybrid abstraction from "the universal wisdom." But individual submission to the comprehensive genius of society, conscious of social affinity with that genius and vibrant with the inspiration of its regnancy. For without society man would be no longer man, and without its overarching genius, no longer a creator. And service—the faithful companion of humility. Again, not the service of commerce and its degradation of profit, but the service of man to humanity.

That was what lay at the heart of the immortal Burns when he sang of "man's inhumanity to man; of the honest man that was king o' men; of the independent mind that could laugh at the pride of appearance; of the time when man to man the world ower shall brothers be, for a' that." It was the service of man to man that made him honest and hence a "king" in social purpose, i.e., the "ruler" of reality, thro' and because of the common association of fraternity.

It is precisely this genius and service which together connote the forces of progress, and which urge society through the groping and painful ways of experimentation to the communist concepts of social unity. To communist society of necessity. Because we have now social production and society can in no wise satisfy its new needs and aspirations by reverting to individual production. Indeed, it

couldn't, for craftsmanship is, in effect, a lost art. Secondly, the private ownership of industry prevents further social progress and denies to society even the satisfaction of sheer necessities. All roads to freedom are effectually barred by capitalist development—except the one avenue of social ownership of industry. When that is effected there is social ownership and social production, i.e., the fundamental prelude to communist society. Time will prove that social prosperity can obtain only with the cessation of capitalist property. Time will show that war shall cease only with the extinction of commerce. And time will vindicate the fact that individual independence is possible only in Socialist society. Then it will receive its highest glorification. For then every avenue of material wealth will be open to achievement, and achievement in turn will prosper and increase the riches of progress and sharpen invention for a yet greater triumph.

If the egotist was grounded in evolution, he would—in principle—recognize and appreciate the interwoven forces that mingle in the criss-cross of ambition and initiative, making or marring their opportunity and development. If he understood the nature of social development he would not be guilty of such egregious folly as to ask for the plan of Socialist society. He would know that society was a process of growth, and its "plan" the reflex ideology of material conditions. In other words, he would cease to be an egotist. But not understanding either of those processes, and primarily conscious of the warranty of the ruling "S," he blunders along the avenues of self, regarding Socialism as a means to his own advantage and fearful lest the turmoil of its initial stages should overwhelm him in the whirlpool of its probable chaos. And because the facts of actual development run counter to his utopian phantasies of advancement, he mocks at the contumacy of the "commonality," rails at the weak; condemns the helpless; lashes the ignorant; jeers at the doped children of tradition, and, with true bourgeois superficiality, denies to the slaves the capacity of self-control, self-expression and responsibility. Even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

It is true we need "leaders." Always there must be an agent expressing material condition, a medium to connect fact and concept. But not the "leader" of political subterfuge, or social "superiority." The leader of Socialism is a power of condition, not the will of man. That power is sustained on the strong soil of necessity. It is visualized in a central organization of delegated authority. Its authority, therefore, expresses the demands and aspirations of an awakened working class whose leadership consists in the clear-cut issue of transforming the demands of that class into the actuality of fact. The development of Capitalism has made the working class the greatest magnitude in society. It has forced that class to the van of social progress. The further development of capital can only increase the effect. It must enroach deeper on the social life and needs of the majority. It must blot out the self-complacent middle class, and its cheap ideation of ambition and interest. It must more imperatively deny the prerogatives of social satisfaction. It must volte face on its own most cherished institutions. But in the cutting of its pound of flesh it sheds the life blood of its civilization. It develops an industry so automatic and cheap, that social coherence is no longer possible. It transforms its society of "free" labor into a society of bonded unemployment, and its craftsmen of franchised equality into the social equality of the proletariat. That is, a people stripped of property and its illusions, of life and its satisfactions, naked and lean—but unbroken—in the grip of the oligarchy of finance.

Thus does society disintegrate into one class, the proletariat, and the proletariat consolidate into one society, with one ambition: the necessary ownership and control of the social means of life. And consciously or not—but certainly conscious in its triumph—the working class represents the wider

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