

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

THE death of Eugene V. Debs, on October 20, removes from the scene one of the most lovable and most abused men of the century. He was indeed a remarkable character. He had a host of friends who did not share his economic convictions; he was tender hearted, generous in his sympathies, tolerant of differences. He had immense courage. He was so bitterly opposed to the savagery of armed conflict between nations that he was willing to go to a federal prison for the right to speak freely his opposition to our entry into the World War. It is creditable to President Harding that he was finally pardoned without a gesture of condescension on the part of the then Chief Executive. And Debs came out of prison to reiterate the same determined opposition to a chaotic civilization. Wherever he went he was greeted with the love of thousands, a love that was dearer to his heart than the acceptance of the political views he stood for.

IT was inevitable, or nearly so, that a man of Debs temperament should accept socialism rather than the more virile doctrine of Henry George. It is no disparagement to his fine intellect to say that the emotional characteristics predominated. Socialism, too, was in the air—he found a party already organized when in 1897 he helped in the formation of the Social Democratic party. The Single Tax was the belief of a sturdier but politically unrecognized group. His experience as a labor organizer had also created an environment favorable to the course he took. At all events he became the leader of the Socialist party; he typified more its social aspirations than its economic structure, for it was not in his nature to accept the rigidity of Marx's social mechanism despite a formal approval. It was the human side of Socialism that drew him, and it was this side that he lived to expound. Now that he is dead we who differed with him must nevertheless be conscious that a great and generous spirit has gone, and that the world is richer for his having lived in it.

SUPPOSE you were asked to deliver an address to graduating students at some college or university on what the country most needs from its educated young men and women. Being a person more or less enlightened would you not begin in a strain something like this:

"To you who have been fortunate enough to have had a college training the country looks for openmindedness

and a courage to follow all inquiries to a conclusion. We look to you for that passionate love of truth and desire for justice on which true citizenship and the future well-being of our country depend. We have a right to expect from you an independence of judgment, and no such over-weening respect for authority as negatives the fullest and unprejudiced investigation of social and economic problems—almost if not quite in the spirit that impelled Dr. Thomas Arnold, the master of Rugby, to say that he arose each morning with the conviction that everything was an unsettled question. We have a right to ask that in this attitude of mind you confront the problems of the world."

SOMETHING like this you might have said. But this is not what President Coolidge told the graduates of Georgetown University. The address was made some time ago, but so characteristic is it of the man that it may even now serve as a text for Reflection and Comment. Here it is. "I would not venture to say what our country most needs from its educated young men and women. But one of its urgent needs is a greater spirit of loyalty which can come only from reverence for constituted authority, faith in things as they are."

THE final arbiter of all intellectual truth is the mind; of all moral truth the conscience. These are the real authorities, and the duty of subjecting all things to the test of reason and conscience a man owes to his fellowmen, and to God. It is the most solemn of all obligations, for truth is the most valuable of all earthly possessions. How great a wrong then he commits by a slavish subservience to authority. The fallibility of human reason is not to be disputed—we hear much of it, certainly too much. But the fallibility of authority is of an infinitely more tenuous nature. We may decide wrongly by following our own mental processes. But ultimately the path if persisted in leads to truth. To the rational processes of the mind there is no other destination. But Authority is the rock in the way of intellectual and social progress. It is a tyranny that keeps kings on their thrones and fakirs in high places; that moves armies across the prostrate bodies of peoples; that sends Conscience that should rule the world quaking and trembling into dark corners.

WHAT credentials has Authority beyond its apparel, insignia, gold lace or sounding titles? Can it "point with pride" to its record, or "view with alarm" the results of disobedience to its commands? Has it such achievements to its credit that justify the suppression of con-