

A Word With You

BE CAREFUL what you pray for," admonishes a modern proverb, "you might get it."

So also with complaints and denunciations. All too much of the conduct of public affairs seems worthy (or unworthy) of our spleen—but you never can tell when your after-dinner philippic may evolve into an invitation to you to take over and see how you can manage. You want the king's head, do you? It is like to roll soon enough—but under conditions in which the people are so wrought up that your own head may be next.

"Carthage must be destroyed," said Cato often enough, and presently Romans were looking at the charred ruins of that once-proud city—and Rome herself would now be "the envy of less happier lands."

Oscar Wilde wrote a little piece about an unholy harlot who goes into the desert to tempt a holy hermit. She describes to him the joys of life in the sinful city, he in turn tells her of the higher happiness of his religion. Finally she repents and wants to live the holy life—but her words, too, have had effect, and the hermit wants her to take him to the wicked city!

When belaboring the status quo, the complainant is apt to be rather strenuous about it, imagining that otherwise there would be little chance of getting a hearing—which may be true. But when a complaint is lodged, who knows how many others might not have been thinking the same thought? Even those who are administering the offending institution might be getting fed up. This was notably the case when the former Director of Internal Revenue, T. Coleman Andrews, publicly denounced the income tax.

The modernists who were gleefully assaulting the citadels of tradition a generation ago now find themselves occupying the citadels—and being assaulted themselves. There are so many things to be taken care of, so many unexpected angles to the business of running things, the new is so little better than the old, that the revolutionary-turned-conservative might well mutter to himself, "I never knew it would be like this"—but publicly, of course, he must stoutly defend his imperfect solutions, just as his overthrown predecessors did.

All departments of our social, political, economic and cultural life stand in need of mending. But watch out for the invisible complexities and ramifications upon which many a darn-ing needle has been broken.

A germinative and creative idea that finds a response in the head and heart of humankind—this is the sort of thing that does the job—like a little leaven that leaveneth the whole loaf.

Such, surely, is the philosophy of Henry George. It is constructive enough and reasoned out enough and simple enough to apply, so that if it were told, "it's your turn to see what you can do," it would survive the difficulties and complications, and come through with positive results.

Yes, I'd be bold enough to pray for the Single Tax, and be ready to face the consequences.

—Robert Clancy

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