

Four Minute Essays

By

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THE YEAST OF '76

DEMOCRACY is like a lump of leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, until the whole was leavened.

Yeast is one of the strangest substances. Scientists do not understand it.

To this natural mystery, Democracy may well be compared; for it is the leaven of souls.

The American revolutionists, when they talked of "certain inalienable rights," when they justified armed rebellion by appealing to ultimate truth, and when they based their new government upon "equality," little knew how far their radical principles would carry them.

They supposed their program involved but independence from England; but the powerful genius of equity they had invoked could not stop there. It must work on "until the whole lump be leavened."

We are beginning to get some notion of the extent of the reach of Democracy.

Simply stated it means that every human being born into the world has a right to equal privilege with every other human being. That is the idea that is transforming the world. That is the gist of Jesus. That is the meaning of 1776. That is the significance of 1861.

It took almost a century for Americans to see that people holding that conviction could not hold slaves.

Since the Rebellion the yeast of justice has worked vigorously.

That it is which causes "labor troubles."

Underneath all the stew of strikes and lock-outs is the unconquerable instinct of equal rights to all. It is not Socialism that is coming, nor Syndicalism, nor any other imported scheme, but simply justice to every man, which is Democracy.

That it is which will unloose the trusts and all feudal secret companies that would control wealth. For wealth will never be secure until it also is democratic.

The Woman-Suffrage movement is but another mark of the working of the yeast of Democracy. For it means simply that the female is entitled to her rights as a human being.

The public school is the result of the same leaven. It means that every child brought into the world has a right to a decent training for life.

Yeast works. Democracy brings con-

stant change. It means perpetual readjustment. And that means danger. There are always those who fear change. For change threatens established things.

Nothing so hates change, and defends establishment, as does ancient fraud. How men fought to preserve "the divine right of kings," to maintain class and caste, to uphold ecclesiastical absolutism, to keep their clutch upon inherited and unearned wealth!

But little by little has the yeast of 1776 permeated the mass. Little by little the old dead lumps of special privilege are being permeated by the ferment of Democracy. The mighty working shall not stop until

"all men's good
Be each man's rule, and universal peace
Lie like a shaft of light across the land,
And like a lane of beams athwart the sea,
Through all the circle of the golden year."