

# The Public

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A Weekly Narrative of History in the Making

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## EDITORIAL

### Lesson of the "Titanic" Disaster.

A tragedy so terrible and which might have been averted, naturally calls out bitter denunciations against the business men whose management is responsible. That all such denunciations, even the bitterest, are excusable in so far as they afford relief to overwrought sorrow or anger or horror, no one with a spark of the human in him would deny. That they are useful in so far as they tend to make ocean travel safer in the future, few would wish to dispute. But to all who have eyes to see or ears to hear, this "Titanic" disaster will carry a deeper lesson than the necessity for better safety appliances at sea; it will arouse higher emotions than anger at any person or class.



The inexcusable destruction of those fifteen hundred human lives was not all from greed. Though greed may have played a part along with many another impulse, it could have been only on the surface. Greed does not run deep. This was proved by the truest of tests at the climax of the tragedy. The democratic impulse—most distinctly human of all human characteristics, braver than greed and more absorbing than selfishness—came uppermost then. At that supreme moment, when human souls were on trial, the appeal to brotherhood was intuitive and overwhelming. Kiser's inspiring verse gives us the picture:

Christian and Jew, and humble and high,  
Master and servant, they stood at last,  
Bound by a glorious brotherly tie.

*At last!* But why only at last? Was the spirit of brotherhood absent before? Had greed crowded it out? Had consciousness of race or class made it insensible to every emotion but fear of death? This cannot be. Fear of death could not awaken a sense of brotherhood, fear of death could not make way for a democratic spirit to rise supreme—not if that sense, not if this spirit, were less powerful among human passions than selfishness. Were the democratic spirit indeed non-existent or paralyzed, were selfishness normally in supreme command, selfishness would be strengthened, not weakened, by fears of death and hopes of escape. No; not selfishness but democracy is the power that moves mankind at every crisis. Selfishness has no hold which the basic sense of democracy cannot loosen; none which it does not loosen in fact whenever the test comes. Yet there is an unhappy significance, unintended, it may be, but true, in Kiser's words—"at last." Is it only "at last," then, only when Death duels with Life, that the brotherly tie becomes the tie that binds, the democratic instinct the instinct that triumphs?



It may seem so. Daily tragedies to which the "Titanic" disaster is by comparison a trifling incident make it seem so. These tragedies are due to the laws under which we live; they are the frightful price that all have to pay for the luxury of some; but as to them, where is the brotherly inspiration to drive away greed, where the democratic instinct to dethrone the instinct of self love? Well may the question be asked, and hard enough may the finding of the answer be. But if the answer be hard to find, isn't it because it is so simple and so near—the pot of gold at the foot of the garden tree? Isn't it there in every human heart, but unawakened? If selfishness stubbornly prevails in the face of every-day industrial tragedies, may the reason not be that the philosophy of selfishness holds so many university chairs, is preached in thin spiritual disguise from so many pulpits, and gets tremendous emphasis in much socialist teaching, while so few stirring appeals are made to the great human instinct of democracy?



It cannot be from any lack of the democratic instinct that beneficiaries of privilege are selfishly indifferent to the heartsickening perennial tragedies of our industrial life. These folk are like all other folks; they have the same mixed impulses of selfishness, generosity and fairness. Not very different can any of them be from those of their own

class who went down with the "Titanic." If they are careless of the awful industrial tragedies, or cold toward them, it must be because their democracy is not awakened. On that doomed vessel, along with their brethren of all classes there, those children of privilege, face to face with the tragic, were as democratic and as brave as any. But the industrial tragedies—these they do not feel, these they do not see, these are unreal to them, these they face, if they face them at all, only as conditions for charitable relief and not as preventable disasters of the social seas. The thrilling fact never stirs them, that they themselves flourish luxuriously upon the very tragedies that submerge their brethren in an ocean of servitude and poverty. What they lack is not democracy but imagination.



Let the privileged see the industrial tragedies they thrive upon, make them realize the tragical cost of their selfish luxury, and their icy greed will melt in the heat of their democracy. Real as their selfishness is, truly as it helps to make poverty and crime, it is no more basic or controlling with their class than with any other. Men of the kind who go bravely to death in sinking ships when rescue-appliances are inadequate for all, will as bravely give up their industrial privileges, once they understand that privilege for some spells disaster for others. Let their imaginations be fired, and they will feel their brotherhood and think of its responsibilities. Their sense of democracy will do the rest. And their imaginations can be fired, but not through calls to a war of classes, however peaceable in form. They must be fired by appeals to the democratic sense of brotherly rights and duties as opposed to undemocratic privilege and the unbrotherly classes that privilege produces.



### The Money Trust.

The Stanley investigating committee of Congress puts its finger upon the Steel trust as the master monopoly of the United States, which expresses itself in one of its manifold forms as "the money trust." Through its directors, the Steel trust is found to control more than 10 billions of the 18 billions of dollars which represent railroad values. In other words, 23 United Steel men control the railroad systems of the country, besides controlling all the natural resources which those railroad systems control, and all the natural resources which the Steel trust controls without them. Although the Stanley committee doesn't mention it, the same 23 men are reasonably sus-