

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)
Anti-Copyright



The End of the Odyssey

Emma Goldman

Emma Goldman
The End of the Odyssey
1910

Retrieved on 25th April 2021 from wiki.libertarian-labyrinth.org
Published in *Mother Earth* 4, no. 2 (April 1909): 47–51 and *Mother Earth* 5, no. 5 (July 1910): 159–163.

usa.anarchistlibraries.net

1910

going straight to perdition. Too bad Anarchists have no centralized authority, or we would have to excommunicate her.

I think I am not exaggerating when I say that during the last two years I have done better work, have reached more people, certainly more English-speaking people, have disposed of a larger amount of literature, and have helped to make Anarchism more widely known than in many previous tours. The credit for the difference is due chiefly to the zeal, the devotion, and skill of Ben Reitman. I believe in giving even the devil his due.

However, some important reconstruction has taken place: the wretched condition of the girls in the beer-bottling department will hereafter be examined by lady inspectors, instead of mere men. Prostitution is to be wiped out by a very drastic measure: the dance halls, which furnished some forgetfulness to the victims of Pabst and Schlitz, are to be taxed by a higher license, or entirely abolished. Thus, Milwaukee will be purified by the old maid, Berger, and the virtue of Socialist morality. But what of economic determinism, which alone is responsible for the social and other evils? Ah, well, so long as it is not responsible for the stupidity of Socialist politicians, all is well.

* * *

And now to the resume. The tour began January 5, closing June 18th. We visited 37 different cities in 25 States, delivering 120 lectures, before a total audience of 40,000, 25,000 of which paid admission,* the balance—being unemployed—were, as usual, admitted free. Nearly 10,000 pieces of literature were sold, and five thousand distributed free. In five cities a successful free speech campaign was made, the expense thereof having been raised at our own meetings. Also, eighty dollars were collected for the Ferrer fund, and a small sum for the striking car men of Philadelphia.

During fifteen years I had been lecturing, depending entirely on the good-will of my comrades at large. Every tour brought the same result: small audiences, mostly of a foreign element, with absolutely no opportunity to dispose of literature. Consequently, my work left nothing of lasting effect.

With the birth of Mother Earth and its dependence on meetings, and the necessity of reaching an American public, the lectures arranged by my comrades, much as I appreciated their solidarity, were absolutely inadequate. Two years ago Dr. Reitman offered to do advance work. Though doubting the practicability of the scheme, I accepted his offer. For that I was roundly condemned. What! An Anarchist to travel with a manager, an ex-tramp, a man of unsettled habits, one who wasn't even a comrade. Surely E. G. is

Contents

I	5
II	10

recklessness, had neither bears nor flagman at the dangerous crossing.

Twenty years of tramping has, like the outdoor life of the savage, helped to sharpen the senses of our "Hobo." Certainly he must have felt the train approach before he could see it. It was he who gave the danger signal while jumping off the car, a fraction of a second before the locomotive struck the wheel. As for myself, like the in festers of the air, I went up in an aeroplane and down again to mother earth,—fortunately not on my head... I was considerably bruised, but otherwise fate seems to have reserved me for a more useful ending. I hope so, at least.

Butte is still owned, spiritually, by the Catholic Church, and bodily by the Copper kings. What chance, then, for Truth?

Of the many States we visited, North Dakota is, for its size, the most wide-awake and eager for new ideas. In both Bismarck and Fargo the meetings were splendidly attended. Particularly interesting was the audience in Bismarck, consisting chiefly of firemen, delegates to the Firemen's Convention. They were greatly pleased when, in discussing Anarchism, I cited the fire department as one of the original voluntary organizations, and, though now under government control, it still retains the spirit of solidarity and helpfulness. Indeed, the firemen are the only useful uniformed men, rendering the hardest and most perilous social service, yet they have neither as much recognition nor remuneration as policemen; certainly not as much chance for graft, which probably accounts for the sturdiness and decency of the average fire fighter.

The Socialist Arcadia of Milwaukee had to be inspected on our way to Chicago. It would have been almost criminal to miss the revolutionary upheaval that was to consist in reformed street sprinkling and three-cent fares. Of course, without bloodshed. To be sure, we found that no blood had been spilt, nor much water, either. The car company still charges five cents, and the police look just as stupid, but a little bit more—class-conscious.

While in Seattle it was my good fortune to meet two women—not the ordinary middle class sort, who out of ennui and lack of stability dabble in all kinds of reform issues, but rather women eager for their own development, and deeply interested in the great social unrest. They have helped to strengthen my conviction that in America women, and not men, will prove the most ardent workers for social reconstruction. Already we find in all radical movements women as the most zealous workers. I say this not because I am partial to my sex, but because the middle class and even the professional man has been made an almost complete automaton by our commercial life; he lacks red blood, without which active interest in an ideal is impossible.

Last year, when the Industrial Workers of Spokane began their free speech fight, I was strongly tempted to go to the scene of action. But knowing the antecedents of the majority of the Industrial Workers—De Leon as parent, and the Daily People for their baby food—I realized that my presence would have been a hindrance instead of a help. But with the free speech fight lost, and all the boys out of prison, I decided to visit Spokane, if only to pay my respects to Chief Sullivan, the Terrible.

Comrade Dickinson was the one who prepared the battlefield; the “manager” preceded me by one day, yet we found Spokane to be the red-letter town of our entire itinerary. Our success was extraordinary. Though hot as in Gehenna, every meeting, afternoon and evening, brought large audiences, and the demand for literature exhausted our supply long before the campaign was over.

The only incident that clouded the otherwise sunny sky of Spokane, and nearly proved our Waterloo, was an automobile accident. For the peace of mind of some of my “friends,” I might say that the accident happened not as was reported, in Emma Goldman’s car, but in that of the hall-keeper, who, like most well-meaning people, possessed more generosity than experience—as a chauffeur. Also the railroad company, with usual American

I

“PERSEVERANCE and postage stamps will get any article published”—its a favorite slogan of a friend of mine.

On several occasions, when I have sent contributions to some of the leading magazines, they were returned. Indeed, it would have been nothing short of a miracle had my articles been accepted. “Progressive ideas are all right, if presented in moderate form and by respectable writers. But Emma Goldman, who is neither ... Dear me! How can we compromise our good standing.” And so I stopped wasting Perseverance and postage stamps. However, I can bear my friend out in the truth of his claim. Perseverance is indeed a wonderful factor in helping to overcome difficulties, especially when combined with postage stamps or their equivalent.

He who travels on the wings of imagination travels far—sometimes. At least I thought so last October, when I took leave of my few but faithful friends to begin my tour around the world.

Ere I had gone very far I had occasion to verify my friend’s opinion as to Perseverance and postage stamps. In India the people are often overtaken by famine epidemics, bringing great disaster to that John Bull ridden country. But how insignificant is the harm wrought by such awful outbreaks when compared to our national pest—election. Its poisonous effects are being felt at all times, but at no time does it assume such monstrous form as during a presidential campaign. Electiomania, America’s greatest malady, far worse and more destructive than cholera. Will medical science never invent some serum to relieve us from its ravages? Just fancy talking reason or ideas to a feverish, delirious brain.

Perseverance and postage stamps suggested that cold compresses of reason have often broken the most stubborn fever. So for a month I diligently applied the cold-cure method. By the latter part of November my methods were crowned with success. The audiences began to show signs of normal temperature and an appetite for wholesome food. High-spirited and light-hearted, I

swiftly moved along the route of success for Mother Earth, nearing to the Pacific Ocean and Australia.

But a new spectre appeared now on the firmament, black and sinister, challenging the utmost vigilance and perseverance—Christmas. What? The month of glad tidings—of peace on earth and good will to all—a spectre? Yes, a hideous, black, deceiving spectre, that has held the human mind in bondage for almost two thousand years.

The legend of the birth of the Redeemer, like all legends, is based on a lie. It has gone on perpetuating itself, until to-day it serves but as an excuse for commercialism, greed, and petty speculation. Christmas—a howling, pushing, scrambling, obsessed bargain huntress; with no interest or time for anything, least of all for Christ himself, were he to chance into the madhouse at Christmas time.

Hopes were low, and postage stamps few. But Perseverance shook his mane and cried, Onward! Nor did he relax his grasp when confronted with police brutality and persecution.

In January I reached Los Angeles, very much depressed and weary. But the balmy clime of the sunny South, coupled with the devotion and thoughtfulness of friends, rejuvenated my spirit. Comrade Claude Riddle's skillful management of my meetings did the rest. I left the Angel City relieved from a heavy burden in the form of a considerable debt, with a hundred and fifty dollars for Mother Earth's friend, the enemy—our printer. But all that was as nothing compared to the hope and strength that were mine, thanks to the love and kindness of my Los Angeles friends.

San Francisco was to be my last battlefield, the date of my departure for Australia having been set for January 23d. The comrades of that city, with Alexander Horr as prime mover, left nothing undone to insure success; but the treacherous Conspiracy of Circumstances assassinated our efforts.

The Conspiracy of Circumstances! Who does not know its power, its quiet, persistent, merciless power. Unlike a foe of flesh

Portland a real holiday. Thus, thanks to her efforts, our work was crowned with the greatest success we had ever had in that city.

Seattle did not look promising. Though there is a considerable coterie of Anarchists in the Mecca on the Puget Sound, only one was sufficiently interested to take the preliminary arrangements in hand. The others, I understand, had no end of grievances, which on closer inspection proved, what Nietzsche called, mental laziness. Friend Cassius Cook, however, went about in his highly methodical manner, doing the best he knew to make my coming known. Owing to the difficulty of procuring halls in Seattle, only two English meetings were arranged. But they made up in quality.

At the lecture on white slavery the audience was given a treat which it will long remember. During the discussion I was attacked bitterly by an Englishman, who was terribly shocked at my frank handling of the subject. With usual Anglo-Saxon cant he protested against the preposterous idea that respectable women should at all consider the prostitute. After the King's subject had closed his plea for "goodness and virtue," a young Hindu student of the University of Washington followed, and in a brief but eloquent discourse he drew a vivid picture of British "goodness and virtue" in India, which kept the audience spellbound. Nothing but intensesness of purpose, great human sympathy, and a deeply outraged soul could speak as that Hindu did.

How little we know in America of the horrors in India, of the robbery, outrages, and pilfering under English rule. How great must be the suffering of the Hindu people if, with their serene attitude towards life, her sons are driven to violent resistance.

Curiosity may sometimes lead to real interest, but those who suffer much from the disagreeable invasion of the curious must needs become impatient and inaccessible. The penalty thereof is that, because of the mass, one rarely comes in closer contact with the individual man and woman. Yet it is only the individual who is of consequence, who adds to one's experience, and deepens one's view of life.

My tour to Australia is not abandoned; only postponed—until I can discover the eloped postage stamps. That I do not lack Perseverance our readers know.

Meanwhile I shall deliver a series of lectures in New York, the first to take place Sunday, April 11, 11 a. m., at Lyric Hall, Sixth avenue, near Forty-second street. The subject of my first lecture will be: “The Psychology of Violence.”

The series will be continued during April and May, the lectures to take place Sunday mornings at Fraternity Hall, 100 West 116th street, corner Lenox avenue, New York.

II

HERE is July, and I am still writing of “Light and Shadows.” But six months’ touring as an Anarchist lecturer furnishes enough material for a whole volume, were one to relate every incident. The latter may not look important in cold print, but in the life of the avant-guard each little event plays a part in the great struggle.

In Portland our Comrade Agnes Fair proved true to her name. Some day I shall acquaint our readers with Agnes. For the present it will suffice to mention that she is a most typical American woman “hobo,” a true child of the Open Road, with the naturalness and simplicity of one who has never lived the cramped city life. Agnes is a proletarian, devoted to the workers with every fiber of her being. Untiring and with boundless zeal she goes like her Russian sisters among the people, into factory, shop, and mine, into the lumber regions, fisheries, and on the street, always knocking at the dull minds and indifferent hearts of the oppressed, urging them to think, to feel, and to rebel.

In co-operation with Comrade Sivin, she arranged five lectures, canvassed every labor gathering and meeting, distributing cards; nor did she overlook any detail that might help to make my visit in

and blood, one cannot meet it in open battle, or even escape it. It is always with you. Never in my experience did I feel its blind, relentless fury as during my stay in San Francisco. It was this inanimate, dumb, blind force that was ever at our heels, using a thousand conceivable tricks to frustrate our every plan. More than once the Conspiracy of Circumstance was near succeeding. But Perseverance was no easy mark; especially the combined tenacity of sturdy warriors who met the enemy with unsheathed sword.

It was a desperate battle, with Perseverance as victor, the Conspiracy of Circumstances eloping with all the post- age stamps. No equivalent at hand to pay transportation to Australia, there was nothing left to do but to steer back to the little home of Mother Earth. But Perseverance would not yield. The South, the South! it urged. Why not?

In all my travels I had never visited the South. Somehow the very thought of it conjured up horrible pictures— pictures of little victims in the cotton fields, of bodies dangling from trees, bodies mutilated to cinders and ashes. But when the idea of going to Texas was suggested to me, I recollected the wise saying, “He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.” Remembering the sweatshops of the East with its countless victims, how could I condemn the South ? Mindful of the race feuds in New York City, the burning of negroes in Springfield, Illinois, how could I cast stones?

After visiting Los Angeles, where I had two good meetings and a debate, I proceeded to Texas. It was indeed a rich experience— though not in postage stamps.

My first stop was El Paso, a city containing, among other nationalities, thirty thousand Mexicans, whom an American administration subservient to that monster Diaz, would not permit to hold public meetings addressed in Spanish. Perchance these poor victims might tell the horrors of their country, the terrible despotism, the appalling poverty, more terrible than in the domain of the Bloody Tsar.

The press of El Paso, with the exception of the News, thrives on the Judas Iscariot gold pieces, ground out of the Mexican peons. No wonder it was so venomous in its denunciation of Anarchism. But with all that we had one meeting in El Paso and disposed of some literature. The principal good, however, was done by the intelligent and fair editorial of the News, which of course would never have been written had I not visited the South.

San Antonio, the most southern city of Texas, with its lazy, quiet, and easy-going exterior, with its old market place where slaves were bought and sold (selling and buying still continues with less cost to the modern master and with the consciousness of the slave that he is now free to sell himself). No hall could be procured in this city, except at a very high rent, and as the outlook was not promising, we decided to hold no meeting. But some propaganda was accomplished by several decent accounts in the local newspapers of interviews.

Houston looks like the average American city, but unlike others, it can boast of a miracle: the Chief of Police and Mayor offering the City Hall for a lecture by Emma Goldman. Who can say that the twentieth century lacks wonders? Having enjoyed the hospitality of the police so often without my consent, I could not accept their offer voluntarily. We secured a hall from some Catholic order, but when it became known that I would speak, the brethren thought Satan broke loose. Terror-stricken, they sent a committee to pay all our expenses and begged to be released from their contract. Who ever heard of a Catholic bargain with Hell?

For a time it looked as if Houston, too, would remain in darkness as to the real meaning of Anarchism. But, thanks to a few brave Houstonians, that city has now some excuse for being on the map. A group of Single Taxers came to our rescue in the freest and kindest spirit. The Single Tax "Log Cabin," donated by one of their comrades, Mr. J. J. Pastoriza, an extraordinary man in many respects, was turned over to our use. The Cabin is on the outskirts of the city, crude and rugged, with a romantic air about it, to satisfy the

most poetic imagination. With lamps dimly lighting the place, and the men and women closely pressed together, it was nevertheless the most inspiring meeting of my entire tour. When I looked into the earnest faces, so near that I could almost touch them, I forgot the hardships of the past and the disappointments of the future—all I felt was the warm pulse of humanity, a rich, great, beautiful possibility of human brotherhood.

Man is greater than all theory. It is therefore of little moment whether Single Tax, economically, is but a petty reform and that, politically, it is hanging on the coat-tails of the Democratic party. As men I have found them the bravest and staunchest champions of liberty in the widest sense. And that is a great deal more than can be said of the party which has a mortgage on "scientific" Socialism, with a premium on the densest kind of stupidity. Its cowardice of authority and intolerance of everything not baptized in the holy church of the Marxian-Engels rites, are really sickening. Of course, there are exceptions, but they merely prove the rule. The few Socialists of independent mind and spirit are not very long tolerated by the Holy Synod.

With two meetings in Fort Worth I closed the tour of Golgotha, and reached New York nailed to the cross of necessity.

Reviewing the struggle of the last six months, I can say that but for Perseverance it would have been impossible. But it was not that alone. My friends and comrades have a big share in the accomplished feat. Especially is this true of the San Francisco and Los Angeles comrades, whose efforts were truly heroic. By that I do not mean to undervalue the assistance of comrades in other cities. Indeed not. Everyone helped in his own way. The way may not always have been the right one, but that is only because most of our comrades make up in idealism what they lack in practical judgment.

However, more than anything else, the unfaltering optimism, the great zeal, and the cheerful bohemianism of our friend, Ben L. Reitman, helped to conquer many obstacles.