

The Man in the Tower

Ross Winn

1900

Much may result of the pending national election. Before the storm is the calm. Revolution is a storm usually preceded by a calm. Recently, great unrest and spasmodic agitation marked the social life of America. The wage workers suddenly appeared mutinous and even rebellious. Strikes became local insurrections; and the usual servility of the wage slaves seemed to give place to a species of daring, of sullen courage, born of desperation. The hideous phantoms of hunger stimulated the toilers to heroic acts of defiance, that alarmed their masters and paralyzed plutocracy's liveried lackeys of the political oligarchy. But there has come a change. Labor is quiet. The whisper of revolt is hushed. The thunders of social unrest are stilled. Plutocracy has taken heart, and dares to babble of prosperity. Behind the shadowy bulwark of the fast budding imperialism, the robber-crew draw a breath of relief. The peril that seemed to menace them has apparently vanished. The industrial atmosphere is at present almost serene.

But appearances were never more deceptive. Still waters have the greatest depth. Plutocracy was never nearer the danger line than today. All this newspaper babble of prosperous times is trash that deceives no one. Facts stand forth everywhere in refutation. The army of unemployed is larger than it was last year, larger by thousands. Wages have not risen; but the necessities of life, food and clothing, are dearer. Poverty rolls its on-rushing tide closer each day to the homes of the masses, and destitution clutches in its skeleton grasp an ever-increasing host of fresh victims. Wealth is more proudly arrogant than ever. The proletariat is more sullenly resentful of its hard lot. Discontent speaks no longer in thunder tones; but its curses are muttered, yet deeper still. There is a calm, but the calm harbingers a storm.

From my tower, I look out upon a troubled sea of existence. It is a strange ocean. The coming and going of phantom forms, the tramping of many feet, a great marching to and fro, the sound of laughter and the noise of weeping, a mixing and mingling of gaiety and grief, of poverty and pomp, of sunshine and shadow, of life and death. But everywhere things seem topsy turvy. Truth in rags, and falsehood crowned. Liberty manacled, and tyranny enthroned. The fair flowers of freedom everywhere wither under the shadow of despotism's iron scepter. There is England, the bully among nations, crushing ruthlessly with her gigantic armies, a handful of farmers who heroically battle for liberty and independence in South Africa. The United States is engaged in a wanton war of aggression and subjugation in the Philippines, continuing bloody Spain's infamous work; and yet these nations proudly boast of their preeminent rank as expounders of

liberty, progress, Christianity and civilization. Falsehood, in a temple of brass, worshipped by the archhypocrites of cant. That is what I see everywhere in the world today.

Might makes right. That is the unwritten creed. Let the weak and defenseless talk their fill of right, of justice, of equity; let these invoke reason, logic, common sense and fair play; but the world's rulers, the dominant class, know only one law, recognize but one rule—might. The Men of the Strong Hand have always ruled, as they do today. The masses, when they assert themselves with arms in their hands, are obeyed, but never otherwise. The dominant power in a nation does not wish to argue, it fears to discuss, and dares not hear the other side. It has a short, simple and effective method for settling controversies—the sword. And here in America, with the introduction of aristocracy, and consequently, aristocratic ideas, comes inevitably the regime of the Strong Hand. Idealism vanishes—we hear no more of the rights of man, nor of human equality, nor of constitutional limitations of government. Instead, we hear the martial tread of soldiery, the rattle of sabres, the rumble of moving artillery. We see the mask of republican hypocrisy laid aside, and are face to face with the armed reality. Government assumes a new phase—it reveals its iron claws. It proposes to rule openly by force, disdaining the democratic mask it has hitherto worn. It is well that this has happened.

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