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Tags

William J. Gorsuch

1891

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The other day a friend, who is so much of a Tolstoian as to be pleased to work for a living, remarked: "You are the first person ever pointed out to me as an Anarchist. Are you an Anarchist?"

I replied: "Some folks say so."

I wish if possible to explain that answer.

I hold that one of the greatest hinderances to social progress is man's proneness to accept and wear tags, labels, badges.

One of the limitations of language, due to differences of experience and therefore of knowledge on the part of individuals, is that the tag attached to any particular faith, sect, or ism always conveys to one mind a meaning distinct from and frequently antithetical to the meaning it conveys to any other mind.

Thus, all men, Mr. Pentecost included, believe in the deity-principle, and yet the God-tag does not mean the same thing to any two men.

So with the tag, Anarchism. If what you attach to that term is what I believe, or you think I believe, then to you I am an Anarchist. Otherwise, I am not.

As no two persons can see things in exactly the same light—similar is not the same—for the moment they did they would

merge into one person, and cease to exist as integral units, I deprecate the use of any and all confusing, disintegrating, and deadly sect tags.

There are certain general principles, generic truths, that the experience of the race has demonstrated to be good.

The utterance of, the insistence upon, and the life-practice of these genera I claim is the whole duty of those who would grow and see society grow.

Liberty, equality, love, purity, are these generic truths. These are the law and the gospel.

You may say: "These also are relative and not absolute, and therefore are subject to misinterpretation and misapplication."

True, they are relative and not absolute, just as man is relative in respect to the universe, but they are not misleading except when intentionally misinterpreted by the imperfect who desire to violate them. To one whose nature, however feebly, is upreaching, they are never confusing, but ever clear, guiding principles. On the four corner stones of liberty, equality, love, and purity, we predicate our position. Whatever is inharmounious there with is evil, vile.

All sects in religion, philosophy, economics, physics, or art, are narrowing to the natures of the acceptors. Sectarians are never discoverers of the newer and better, but ever bitter adherents of the old and outgrown. No Christ was ever insulted or crucified by a man, or men, but always by sectarians, who, by the persecution, proved they knew their ancient truth, but present error was doomed. If they had not feared the new thought, they would have contemptuously ignored it.

The newest and most radical sect is as intolerant and jealous as the oldest and most conservative. If the new one does not as openly show the persecuting spirit as does the old, it is due to want of strength, and not to lack of will. This is true of all sects; of Anarchists, Single-taxers, Socialists, Materialists, Agnostics, and Universalists, as well as of Monarchists, Republicans, Protectionists, Spiritualists, and Roman Catholics.

For this reason I don't like tags, and object to having one pinned on my breast. I prefer to be a free man. Owned by no party, clique, clan, or sect, I browse where I please, and accept truth wherever I find it. Every sect to which man has ever adhered has contained some truth and much error. Eclectic, rather than pedantic, I choose to accept the truth and reject the error. I decidedly refuse to swallow the error in order to gain the truth. The reason we see so many sick men is because they open their mouths and shut their eyes and gulp the indigestible whole. This is wrong. It's sure to narcotize, or nauseate.

"But," I hear the objector, "men must combine, form sects, in order to do effective work for progress."

True, we must unite the efforts of many men to accomplish something to which the strength of one man is unequal, but it does not follow that the bond of union should be of such a character that some of the men can usurp the privilege of deciding whether the others are doing their full share, or in the proper way. As soon as the power of thus judging and deciding is granted to a few, or a set, a sect is born, arrested development ensues, excommunication is in order, and fossilization is the result.

No organization can rightfully and justly exist that cannot do so from its own inherent vitality, its own righteousness. When it needs artificial strengthening bands, it has outlived its usefulness, and nature demands that it fall and die, thus making fertile the soil for newer and higher evolvments. But men who see in the perpetuation of the organization, power or emolument for themselves object, and gathering together those they can influence, draw the lines of holiness a little closer and give birth to that thing of death, a sect.

If we would but learn the truly spiritual law of labor, which is to be creative, to evolve, to originate, to give out the new, no sects could ever be formed. The sectarian, leader, or follower, is an absorbent, a sponge. He has lost the faculty of producing, creating, and retained only the power of assimilation. The

latter function swine exercise, as well as men, but I think we all desire to advance at least slightly beyond that stage of development. If we would we must learn this lesson: Each one's part is to do his own full duty to himself by living a life of purity and love, and by asserting liberty and equality through refusing, under any circumstances, to infringe upon any other individual's liberty and right of equality.

In every department of human thought and action the bad habit of wearing and swearing by tags prevails. Be tagged or be damned. I won't be either. I refuse to be classified because I reserve the right to grow.

"But if you don't stay planted in one spot you're inconsistent."

All right. I'd rather be inconsistent than be a mollusk.

What I don't know today I am glad to find out tomorrow, and I'm not ashamed to share my new knowledge with whoever has ears to hear.

Somehow I can't get the notion out of my mind that, after all, the old world wags along in just about the best possible way.

Now, don't hold up your hands in holy horror and cry: "Oh my! Oh my! And I've heard you rail against the evil and infamy of the present!"

I don't mean that society is as perfect as it will be, but I do mean that we are growing toward perfection just as rapidly as is healthy. You know, if a boy shoots up too fast it's a sure sign of organic disorder. Neither do I mean that we who gain slight glimpses of the truth should fold our hands and rest contented with the idea that the forces of social evolution will work out the salvation of the race without any assistance from us. We are part of those same forces. If we see a truth and suppress and do not utter that truth, we are stumbling blocks in the way of progress. If we think and speak our best thought, we become active principles, rendering easier and quicker the practical application of truth. In the one case we are corpses

that have missed burial; in the other, we are living men who justify our right to life.

I think we should tear off the tags, and be no longer blinded followers of this, that, or the other school. Fiercely battling among ourselves, we see no good in brothers who have our ultimate in view, but believe in a different way of getting there and thus wasting our energies in internecine strife, we afford a spectacle at which humanity weeps, while greed in self-gratulation approvingly smiles.

Let us learn to be men, and not partisans. Let us search out, if we can, our common, not our antagonistic attributes and aspirations, and uniting on the basis of what all admit is good and true, discover with what ease evil can be dethroned and justice enfranchised.

Read "Volney's Ruins" and learn that all people agree that the sun appears neither triangular nor square, but round; that gold is heavier than lead; that lead is softer than iron; that sugar is sweet and gall bitter; that we love pleasure and hate pain; but that all people do not agree as to whether the moon is inhabited, or a cavern is in the centre of the earth; that what we can demonstrate we agree upon, but when we must conjecture we don't tag and fight. Apply this rule: when men bitterly oppose each other it is because the faith that is within them is not based on certainty. How health-giving it would be if all earnest reformers would analyze the foundations of their theories before enthusiastically going gunning for opponents.

Read Volney!