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WILLIAM JIMMING BRITAN  
1896

## CHAPTER XXV.

### LABOR DAY.

**L**ABOR day deserves a chapter by itself. An invitation to speak in Chicago on Labor day was extended to me soon after the National Convention by the Building Trades Council of that city, but it was not until a short time before the day arrived that I found it possible to give a definite reply. The forenoon was devoted to a parade, which was said to be one of the most imposing ever held on such an occasion. During the forenoon a committee of horse-shoers called and on behalf of their order presented a silver horseshoe, which now occupies a place in my cabinet. I might add here that during the campaign some twenty horseshoes were received from various sources, some solid silver, some silver-plated, some of polished steel and some old and rusty, just as they were picked up in the road. The horseshoe is said to bring good luck to its possessor; I leave each reader to determine for himself whether the horseshoe has lost its charm, whether too many horseshoes suspend the operation of the rule, or whether, after all, the result was fortunate for me. In the afternoon a committee consisting of Messrs. Edward Carroll, president of the Building Trades Council, John J. Ryan, chairman of the committee of speakers, and J. D. McKinley, chairman of the Carpenters' District Committee, called and accompanied me to Sharpshooters' Park. Here a large and enthusiastic crowd was assembled. My speech on this occasion is given below:

#### Labor Day Speech.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen: I desire to thank the Building Trades Council for the opportunity to speak to the people assembled today. Labor day has become a fixed event among our holidays, and it is well that it is so, because on this day, all over the nation, those who are engaged in the production of wealth meet with each other to discuss the questions in which working men are especially interested, and to emphasize before the world that there is nothing dishonorable in the fact that one earns his bread in the sweat of his face. I am glad to stand in the presence of those to whom this nation is so largely indebted for all that it has been, for all that it is now, and for all that it can hope to be.

I am not indulging in idle flattery when I say to you that no other people



are so important to the welfare of society as those whose brain and muscle convert the natural resources of the world into material wealth.

I call your attention to the language of Hon. John G. Carlisle, in 1878, when he described these people as "the struggling masses who produce the wealth and pay the taxes of the country." He did not praise them too highly. "The struggling masses" not only produce the wealth and pay the taxes of the country in time of peace, but "the struggling masses" have ever been, and must ever be, the nation's surest protection in time of peril.

Abraham Lincoln expressed himself strongly upon this subject. In a message to Congress, in 1861, he said:

Monarchy itself is sometimes hinted at as a possible refuge from the power of the people. In my present position I could scarcely be justified were I to omit raising a warning voice against this approach of returning despotism. It is not needed or fitting here that a general argument should be made in favor of popular institutions, but there is one point with its connection not so hackneyed as most others, to which I ask a brief attention. It is the effort to place capital on an equal footing with, if not above, labor in the structure of government; it is assumed that labor is available only in connection with capital, that nobody labors unless somebody else owning capital somehow, by the use of it, induces him to labor.

And then he adds:

Labor is prior to and independent of capital. Capital is only the fruit of labor, and could never have existed if labor had not first existed. Labor is the superior of capital and deserves much the higher consideration.

And mark these words of his:

No men living are more worthy to be trusted than those who toil up from poverty; none less inclined to take or touch aught which they have not honestly earned. Let them beware of surrendering a political power which they already possess and which, if surrendered, will surely be used to close the doors of advancement against such as they, and to fix new disabilities and burdens upon them till all of liberty shall be lost.

These are the words of Lincoln. They were not intended to arouse animosity against capital, but they state a great truth that ought always to be remembered—that capital is but the fruit of labor, and that labor cannot be destroyed without destroying the possibility of future capital.

I have quoted from two of our public men. Let me now read to you the language used by one whose words have won for him the title of the wisest of men—Solomon. He said:

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full, and deny Thee and say, who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor, and steal and take the name of my God in vain.

Solomon desired neither poverty nor riches. He rightly estimated the dangers which lie at either extreme and preferred the—I was about to say, golden, but will call it the—golden and silver mean. Neither great wealth nor abject poverty furnishes the soil in which the best civilization grows. Those who are hard pressed by poverty lose the ambition, the inspiration and the high purpose which lead men to the greatest achievements; while those who possess too great riches lack the necessity for that labor which is absolutely essential to the development of all that is useful. Solomon was right, therefore, when he praised the intermediate condition, for the great middle classes are the bulwark of society, and from them has come almost all the good that has blessed the human race.

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The highest compliment ever paid to any class of people was paid to those who are called the common people. When we use that term there are some who say that we are appealing to the passions of the masses; there are some who apply the name demagogue to anybody who speaks of the common people. When the meek and lowly Nazarene came to preach "peace on earth, good will toward men," he was not welcomed by those who "devour widow's houses and for a pretense make long prayers." By whom was he welcomed? The Scriptures tell us that when he gave that great commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," the common people heard him gladly. This, I repeat, is the highest compliment that has ever been paid to any class of people, and the common people are the only people who have ever received gladly the doctrines of humanity and equality.

I do not mean to say that there have been no exceptions to the general rule. There have always been found among the richer classes those who were filled with the spirit of philanthropy, those who were willing to spend their lives in the uplifting of their fellows. But I am now speaking of general rules, not of exceptions. Nor do I mean that there have never been found among the common people those who would betray their fellows. Everywhere, at all times and in all classes of society, the character of Judas has been found. On the dark page of all history appears the name of the man who betrays his brother. Yet in spite of these exceptions, the common people have been the great and controlling force which has lifted civilization to higher ground.

There have been three important forms of government. First, the monarchy, in which the king rules by right divine; second, the aristocracy, in which the few govern; and, third, the democracy, in which the people rule. Why is it that the strength of democracy—I do not use the word in a party sense, but in its broader meaning—why is it that the strength of democracy has always been found among the common people? The reason is simple enough. If a man has high position, great ability, or great wealth he may be able to keep on the good side of the king. If he possess great influence he may secure a place as one of the ruling class in an aristocracy. But there is no form of government which the masses dare leave to their children except a democracy in which each citizen is protected in the enjoyment of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The great common people believe in a democratic form of government because it is only under a democratic form of government that they are able to fully protect their rights and defend their interests.

Let me call your attention for a moment to the objects of government. Our Government derives its powers from the consent of the governed. What kind of government will people consent to? Only that kind which protects all and knows no favoritism. The people desire a government in which all citizens stand upon the same plane without regard to wealth or position in society. A government which guarantees equal rights to all and confers special privileges upon none is the government which appeals to the affections of the common people.

There are two things to be especially considered in government. The first is that in the enactment of all legislation no advantage should be given to one person over another if that advantage can be avoided. It is the duty of



government to protect all from injustice and to do so without showing partiality for any one or any class. Again, government must restrain men from injuring one another. Jefferson declared this to be one of the important duties of government, and the government which does not restrain the strongest citizen from injuring the weakest citizen fails to do its whole duty. An idea is the most important thing that a person can get into his head, and we gather our ideas from every source. I was passing through Iowa some months ago and got an idea from some hogs. I noticed a number of hogs rooting in a field and tearing up the ground. The first thought that came to me was that they were destroying property, and that carried me back to the time when I lived on a farm, and I remembered that we put rings in the noses of our hogs. And why? Not to keep the hogs from getting fat, for we were more interested in their getting fat than they were; the sooner they became fat, the sooner we killed them; the longer they were in getting fat, the longer they lived. But we put rings in the noses of the hogs so that while they were getting fat they would not destroy more property than they were worth. And then it occurred to me that one of the most important duties of government is to put rings in the noses of hogs. Now, my friends, do not consider this a reflection upon your neighbor. We are all hoggish to a certain extent and need restraining. We are all selfish and need to have that selfishness curbed. The Creator did not make any class of people who are entirely unselfish. I can prove by you that your neighbors are selfish, and I can prove by your neighbors that you are selfish, but I have faith in our form of government because the people in their better moments are willing to enact laws which will restrain them in the hours of temptation. We submit to restraint upon ourselves in order that others may be restrained from injuring us.

When I say that one of the duties of government is to put rings in the noses of hogs, I simply mean that, while society is interested in having every citizen become independent and self-supporting, that while society is interested in having every citizen secure enough of this world's goods to supply his own wants, educate his children, and leave him something for his declining days, yet society is also interested in having laws which will prevent any citizen from destroying more than he is worth while he is securing his own independence.

Ours is the best form of government known among men because it can be made to reflect the best intelligence, the highest virtue, and the purest patriotism of the people. In other words, our form of government is the best because it can be made as good as we deserve to have. Let me warn you against confusing government itself with the abuses of government. Andrew Jackson said that there were no necessary evils in government; that its evils existed only in its abuses. He was right, my friends. There are no necessary evils in government, and no man who understands the advantages of government will ever raise his voice or hand against it. It is the abuses of government against which we have a right to complain. There are those who stand ready to denounce as a disturber of the public peace anyone who criticises the abuses of government; and this denunciation is generally most severe from those who are enjoying the advantages which arise from the abuses complained of. The reformer is generally accused of stirring up discontent. I desire to remind you that discontent lies at the foundation of all progress. So long

as you are satisfied, you are satisfied with present conditions. Had our forefathers been satisfied, they would have had a Declaration of the conditions under which they consented into the form of a Declaration with their blood. There is one great difference between the monarchial form. If the people petition, but their petition may end in despair or it may end in reform. If government ends in reform.

I am not going to violate the discussion of partisan questions, certain broad questions which

The ballot is the weapon of every legislative wrong. It is to right their wrongs at the other way.

The ballot, to be effective in a country which made it impossible for them to have. Because of the fact that they were afraid to exercise freedom of speech given to them under our Constitution, a reform in the ballot laws was necessary. Labor organizations which cause they secured the Australian ballot law. That ballot law did not give to the capitalistic classes; it came to the people. Today they enjoy the advantages of its adoption.

Among all the agencies for improving the condition of the people, I believe that labor organizations are the best. Men together where they can combine their influence, and the blessings which have been criticised and condemned by the government. That railroads, large corporations should be organized. Yet labor organizations have protected themselves and done much for society in a

I refer to the arbitration principle. That principle has been brought into the laboring men of the country; it is simply an extension of a partial tribunal before which



without showing partiality restrain men from injuring the important duties of the strongest citizen sole duty. An idea is the head, and we gather our wa some months ago and of hogs rooting in a field came to me was that they o the time when I lived on noses of our hogs. And e were more interested in became fat, the sooner we ie longer they lived. But they were getting fat they rth. And then it occurred overnment is to put rings consider this a reflection rtain extent and need t selfishness curbed. The rely unselfish. I can prove prove by your neighbors n of government because enact laws which will re- it to restraint upon our- juring us.

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as you are satisfied, you never move forward. It is only when you are dissatisfied with present conditions that you try to improve them. Why, my friends, had our forefathers been satisfied with English political supremacy we never would have had a Declaration of Independence. They were not content with the conditions under which they lived, and they put that expression of discontent into the form of a Declaration of Independence, and maintained that declaration with their blood. That discontent gave us our form of government. There is one great difference between our form of government and the monarchical form. If the people are discontented under a monarchy they can petition, but their petition may be disregarded. Discontent under a monarchy may end in despair or it may end in revolution. Discontent under our form of government ends in reform through the peaceful means of the ballot.

I am not going to violate the proprieties of this occasion by entering into the discussion of partisan questions. But I desire to call your attention to certain broad questions which cannot be confined within party lines.

The ballot is the weapon by which the people of this country must right every legislative wrong. Whenever they lack the intelligence and patriotism to right their wrongs at the ballot box they will be unable to right them in any other way.

The ballot, to be effective, must be used; and conditions arose in this country which made it impossible for all the people to use the ballot which they had. Because of the circumstances which surrounded them, many men were afraid to exercise freely and according to conscience the political rights given to them under our institutions. What did they do? They demanded a reform in the ballot laws. I honor the laboring men of this country and the labor organizations which stand at the head of the wage-earning classes because they secured the Australian ballot for themselves and for the people at large. That ballot law did not come down to the laboring men from the capitalistic classes; it came as a result of their own demand. The laboring men today enjoy the advantages of the Australian ballot because they compelled its adoption.

Among all the agencies which for the past few years have been at work improving the condition and protecting the rights of the wage earners. I believe that labor organizations stand first. They have brought the laboring men together where they could compare their views, unite their strength and combine their influence, and we have these organizations to thank for many of the blessings which have been secured for those who toil. Some have criticised and condemned labor organizations. Some believe that banks should join associations, that railroad managers should join associations, that all the large corporations should join associations, but that laboring men should not organize. Yet labor organizations have been the means by which working men have protected themselves in their contests. The labor organizations have done much for society in another way.

I refer to the arbitration of differences between employers and employees. That principle has been brought to the attention of the American people by the laboring men of the country. I believe in arbitration. The principle is not new; it is simply an extension of the court of justice. Arbitration provides an impartial tribunal before which men may settle their differences instead of resort-



ing to violence. New conditions necessitate new laws. In former years when one man employed a few men to work for him, there was an intimate acquaintance between employer and employe, and that intimate acquaintance developed a personal sympathy which regulated their dealings with each other. All this is changed. Now when one corporation employs thousands and even tens of thousands of persons, personal acquaintance between employer and employe is impossible. The law must therefore supply the element of justice which was formerly supplied by personal acquaintance and sympathy. Arbitration is not only good for employer and employe, but is necessary for the security of society. Society has, in fact, higher claims than either employer or employe. The whole people are disturbed by the conflicts between labor and capital, and the best interests of society demand that these differences shall be submitted to and settled by courts of arbitration rather than by trials of strength.

I am not here to tell you what opinions you should hold. I am not here to discuss the measures which, in my judgment, would relieve present conditions. But as an American citizen speaking to American citizens, I have a right to urge you to recognize the responsibilities which rest upon you, and to prepare yourselves for the intelligent discharge of every political duty imposed upon you. Government was not instituted among men to confer special privileges upon any one, but rather to protect all citizens alike in order that they may enjoy the fruits of their own toil. It is the duty of government to make the conditions surrounding the people as favorable as possible. You must have your opinions, and, by expressing those opinions, must have your influence in determining what these conditions shall be. If you find a large number of men out of employment, you have a right to inquire whether such idleness is due to natural laws or whether it is due to vicious legislation. If it is due to legislation, then it is not only your right but your duty to change that legislation. The greatest menace to the employed laborer today is the increasing army of the unemployed. It menaces every man who holds a position, and, if that army continues to increase, it is only a question of time when those who are, as you may say, on the ragged edge, will leave the ranks of the employed to join those who are out of work.

I am one of those who believe that if you increase the number of those who cannot find work and yet must eat, you will drive men to desperation and increase the ranks of the criminals by the addition of many who would be earning bread under better conditions. If you find idleness and crime increasing, it is not your privilege only, it is a duty which you owe to yourselves and to your country to consider whether the conditions cannot be improved.

Now a word in regard to the ballot. I beg you to remember that it was not given to you by your employer; nor was it given to you for his use. The right to vote was conferred upon you by law. You had it before you became an employe; it will still be yours after your employment ceases. You do not tell your employer that you will quit working for him unless he votes as you desire, and yet you have as much right to say that to him as he has to tell you that you will have to quit working for him unless you vote as he wants you to. When I say this, I am not afraid of offending anybody, for it is impossible to offend an employer who thinks that he has a right to control the vote of his

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employe because he pays him wages. I have known men who thought that, because they loaned money to a man, he must vote as they wanted him to or risk foreclosure. I am not afraid of offending any man who entertains this belief, because a man who will use a loan to intimidate a citizen or deprive him of his independence has yet to learn the genius of the institutions under which we live. I cannot impress upon you any more important truth than this: that your ballot is your own to do with it what you please and that you have only to satisfy your own judgment and conscience.

There is one citizen in this country who can prove himself unworthy of the ballot which has been given to him, and he is the citizen who either sells it or permits it to be wrested from him under coercion. Whenever a man offers you pay for your vote he insults your manhood, and you ought to have no respect for him. And the man, who instead of insulting your manhood by an offer of purchase, attempts to intimidate you to coerce you, insults your citizenship as well as your manhood.

My friends, in this world people have just about as much of good as they deserve. At least, the best way to secure anything that is desirable is to first deserve that thing. If the people of this country want good laws, they themselves must secure them. If the people want to repeal bad laws, they alone have the power to do it. In a government like ours every year offers the citizen an opportunity to prove his love of country. Every year offers him an opportunity to manifest his patriotism.

It is said that vigilance is the price of liberty. Yes, it is not only the price of national liberty, but it is the price of individual liberty as well. The citizen who is the most watchful of his public servants has the best chance of living under good laws and beneficent institutions. The citizen who is careless and indifferent is most likely to be the victim of misrule.

Let me leave with you this parting word. Whatever may be our views on political questions, whatever may be our positions upon the issues which arise from time to time, it should be the highest ambition of each one of us to prove himself worthy of that greatest of all names—an American citizen.

Dr. Barth, an eminent German monometallist, who visited this country during the campaign, was an interested spectator. The crowd was so demonstrative in its evidences of friendliness that our party had difficulty in making its exit.

Going from the Labor Day celebration to the Burlington depot, I boarded the train for the West, and after brief stops at Aurora, Mendota, Galesburg, Monmouth, and a few other places, arrived in Lincoln on Tuesday morning. I give below a detailed statement of route:

#### Mileage on Second Trip.

Lincoln to Chicago, over Rock Island railway.....	555 miles
Chicago to New York, over Pennsylvania railway.....	913 "
New York to Buffalo, over New York Central.....	440 "
Buffalo to Erie and return, over Lake Shore & Michigan Southern .....	176 "