

Kansas Memory



The voice of labor

A speech given by David Overmyer on Labor Day, September 2, 1889, in Topeka, Kansas. The speech focuses on the interests and welfare of the laboring classes in the country.

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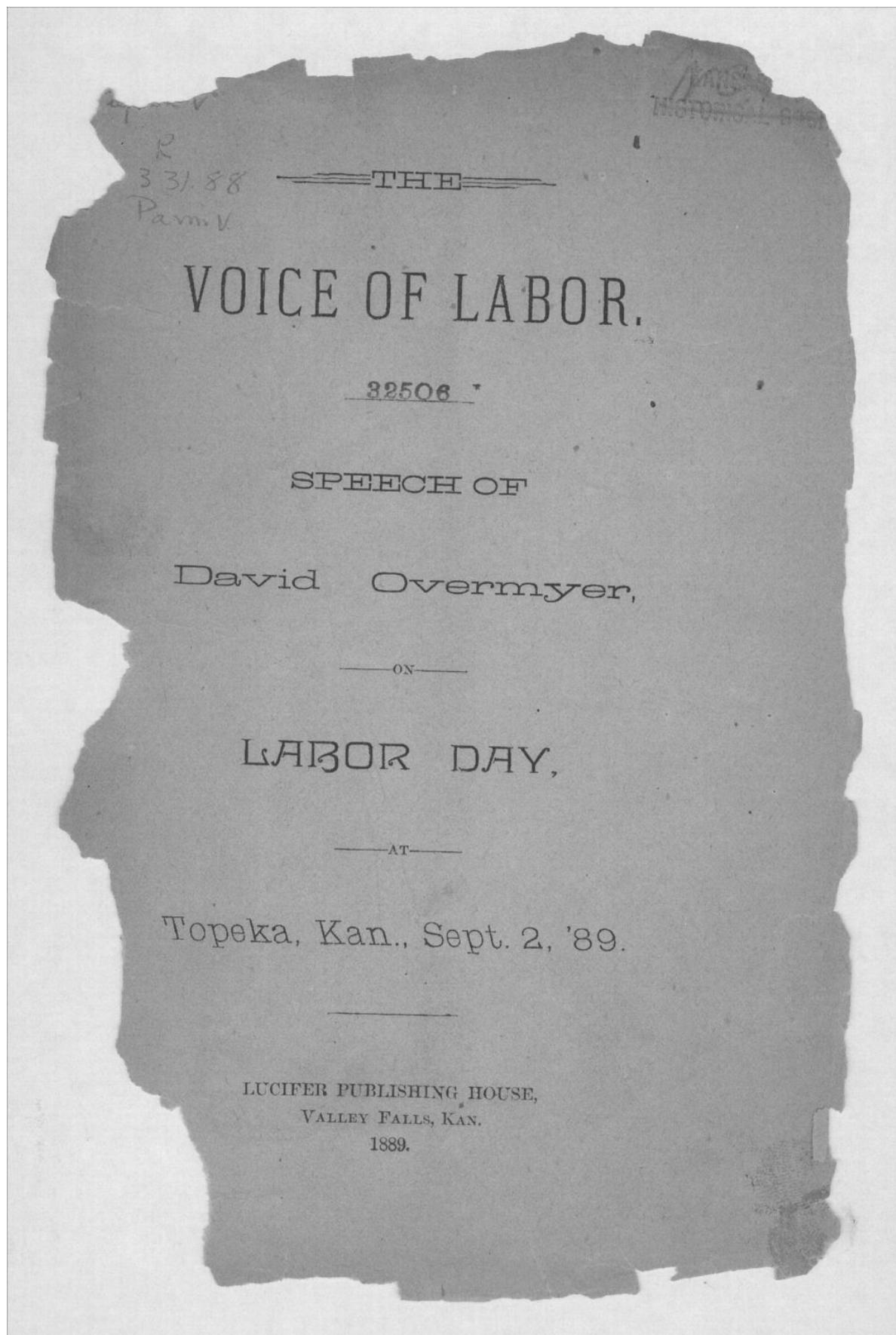
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[The following brief but clear and powerful statement of the case now pending between the producers of all wealth and the non-producing employers of labor, was listened to with rapt attention by some two thousand working men and others, on Labor Day at Oakland Park, Topeka, Kan.—PUBLISHER.]

It is not my habit to speak from manuscript, but as this is the first day of this kind ever celebrated in Kansas, and as labor meetings are sometimes looked upon with suspicion, and those who address them with even more suspicion, I have concluded to commit my thoughts to writing.

Don't be alarmed. You will hear no anarchy. You will hear no socialism. But you will hear something of justice, and something of liberty, if I know the meaning of those words.

"Oh! liberty can man resign thee
Once having felt thy generous flame,
Can bolts and prison bars confine thee
Or whips thy noble spirit tame."

The written invitation to me to address this meeting, stated, in substance, that this meeting would be held for the purpose of advancing the interests and welfare of the laboring classes, through agitation for a reduction of the hours of labor.

I am aware of the power of agitation. I realize the fact that about all of the rights that the people now enjoy are the fruit of agitation, and that this agitation has been carried on for the most part by laborers. Indeed no other element felt the need of agitation.

About the year 1825 the laborers of this country, through organization and leadership in the city of New York began to look forward and forecast the future, and shortly after put forth their twelve demands, which will be found to embody about all the

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beneficent provisions of existing laws, with some not yet attained, and some which are still the subject of debate, with some others, which would now be considered, revolutionary, anarchistic, heretical and treasonable. These twelve demands were as follows:

First—The right of man to the soil; vote yourself a farm.

Second—Down with monopolies, especially the United States bank.

Third—Freedom of public lands.

Fourth—Homesteads made inalienable.

Fifth—Abolition of all laws for the collection of debts.

Sixth—A general bankrupt law.

Seventh—A lien of the laborer upon his own work for his wages.

Eighth—Abolition of imprisonment for debt.

Ninth—Equal rights for women with men in all respects.

Tenth—Abolition of chattel slavery, and of wage slavery.

Eleventh—Land limitation to 160 acres. No person after the passage of this law to become possessed of more than that amount of land. But when a land monopolist died his heirs were to take each his legal number of acres and be compelled to sell the surplus, using the proceeds as they pleased.

Twelfth—Mails in the United States to run on the Sabbath.

When I consider the number and boldness of these demands, when I contemplate the vast changes which must take place in our social and political systems before better conditions for the masses can be considered as permanently secured, and, then, when I read over again and again the purpose of this meeting viz: To advance the interests and welfare of the laboring classes, through agitation for a reduction of the hours of labor, I involuntarily exclaim: "Indeed! Indeed! Is that all?"

And is it possible that the great army of laborers

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must really resort to agitation in order to get permission to go to work an hour later in the morning, or quit work an hour earlier in the evening? Of course this applies to the wage workers, those who work for other men or corporations; those who work for themselves need not and do not ask for this relief. They can work as early and as late as they please. They can commence work when it suits them and quit work when it suits them. They are free men, so far at least as the hours of labor are concerned. They are masters of their own time. Not so the wage laborer. He must come when another requires him to come; he may go when another permits him to go. When we consider the millions who toil for wages, and that their employers number at most but a few thousands, and, then, when we reflect, that these millions are powerless to do as they please, respecting the number of hours that they may labor each day—the degree of their dependence, the measure of their bondage begins to be revealed. And when we take into the account the lockouts, the peremptory and unexplained dismissal and discharge of laborers, the blacklists and persecutions, which attend every act of self-assertion upon the part of the laborer; the company store to which laborers are kept in debt for damaged provision and shoddy clothing, sold to them at an advance of from twenty to thirty per cent over the regular market price; the company tenant house, with its meagre accommodations and high rent; the arbitrary reductions of wages to suit the whims of heartless and conscienceless employers; when we take into consideration the tariff, trust, and transportation robberies; the extortionate rents extorted by ordinary landlords, and the indescribable scoundrels who plunder and pillage the poor with usurious contracts and chattel mortgages; the cause of this helplessness, this dependence this bondage, is perfectly clear.

Being powerless to help themselves—powerless to move their masters—the wage laborers are under the

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necessity of making an appeal to that outside public, which, while it generally takes sides with the employer, yet may be supposed to be influenced by considerations of common fairness, common decency, and common humanity.

Labor fells the forests, navigates the deep, carries on commerce, plows, sows, reaps, builds vast cities, converts the wilderness into a garden, feeds, clothes, supports and maintains the world. Why is it, then, that those, who perform the heavy work, who toil in mines, factories workshops, on buildings, railroads and public works, who create wealth, who originate capital, who produce the substance which sustains civilization itself, why is it that they are beggared, disinherited, enslaved? Why is it that the few roil in wealth, which is so great as to be a burden; while the many suffer for the barest necessities of life? And that, too, where by the labor of the many, there is produced annually much more than enough for all? Why upon the soil of Illinois are people starving to death in the midst of great abundance? What black devil from Hell's nethermost depth has crept into the heart of man that he can thus oppose his fellow-man? It is because we are a generation of merciless money-gatherers and heartless power-seekers. It is because the few have got control of all the avenues of wealth, of all of the channels of profit, and appropriate the proceeds of the labor of the many. They fence in every fountain, and bestride every stream, and dole out the waters to the famishing multitudes grudgingly, in small quantities, and for such service as they themselves shall command. But how did they come in possession of such advantages; how did a few persons obtain such a mastery over the many? I answer: In other countries, and in former times, by conquest and open violence. In this country, it has been accomplished by procuring laws to be passed, so framed, as to enable those who procure their passage, to concentrate the property of the country in a few hands. In this country the work of concentration

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and centralization of wealth and power has been going steadily and quietly forward for many years, and since the close of the civil war, that which was previously a barely perceptible tendency has become an apparently irresistible tide. As African slavery in its day entrenched itself behind the law, so since its downfall, every capitalistic schemer, every projector of monetary chimera, every exploiter and oppressor of labor, every farseeing financier; in short, all those who, from their experience and knowledge of commerce, of trade and finance, whose acquaintance with the resources, property and industries of the country, enabled them to understand what untold fortunes might be made by a prompt seizure of its resources, a dextrous direction of its activities, a consummate control of its property, and a remorseless taxation of its people, have resorted to the laws to effect their purposes.

With the stealth of panthers and the voracious impetuosity of hyenas, they have besieged congress and the state legislatures by night and by day, for grants, concessions, franchises, opportunities, charters, privileges, offices and advantages, wherewith to enrich themselves through organizations and combinations in the name of the public welfare and at the expense of the people.

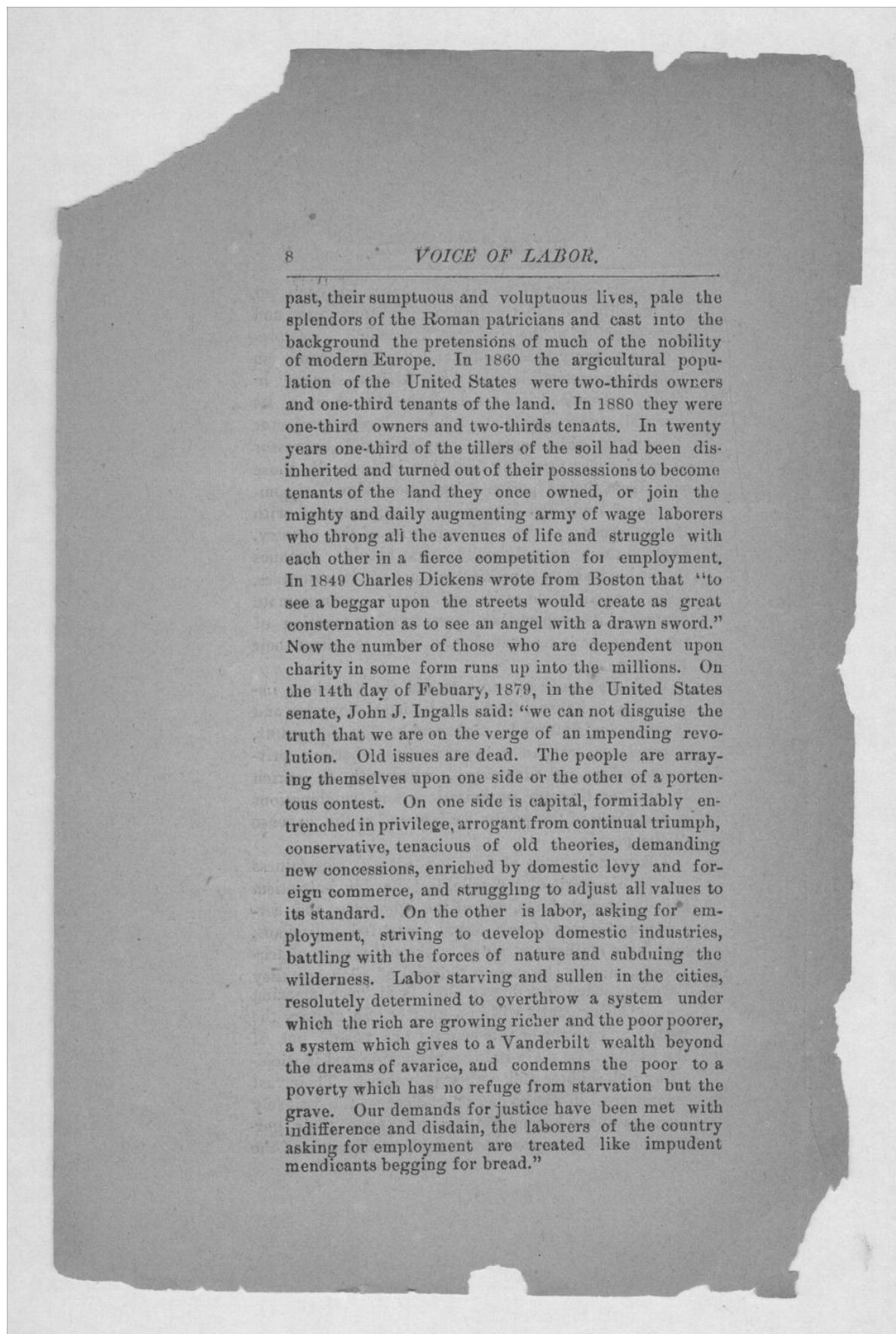
Taking advantage of the good nature, trustfulness and public spirit of a people, famous for patriotism and disinterestedness, and of the ignorance and corruption of a race of half baked, mast-fed politicians, who were neither restrained by the self-respect of aristocrats, nor by the stern self-denial of plebeians, they have succeeded to a degree that is at once amazing and appalling, until within a quarter of a century the wealth and power of this country has passed out of the hands of its plain industrious people, and is wielded by rich robbers and vulgar parvenues. Their vast estates rival in extent and magnificence the princely domains of the barons of the middle ages, their gorgeous mansions represent the nobleman's castle of the

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No labor agitator, nay, not even the condemned anarchists, ever arraigned capitalistic despotism in stronger terms than did Mr. Ingalls. All that he said was then true, and it is all true now, with the horrors which he described increased in a ten fold ratio, and with the alternative not far ahead of a prompt return to reason and right or of the bloodiest revolution recorded in history. And, yet, the senator is, now, strangely silent upon this subject. The same power which holds labor bound hand and foot has entirely silenced this once bold and potent advocate of the people's cause. Dire distress and gaunt starvation now stalk through the land like the weird precursor of impending desolation. The eye, that ten years ago, could see the cause of their coming is now blind to their presence. The voice that could then proclaim the approaching danger, now awed into silence, is heard no more. What wonder, then, that those who labor for the men who wield this mighty power are obliged to call upon others than their employers to redress their grievances, right their wrongs, and mete out justice to them? What wonder that they must make their humble appeal to the public at large to grant them, through the law, a slight reduction of their hours of daily toil?

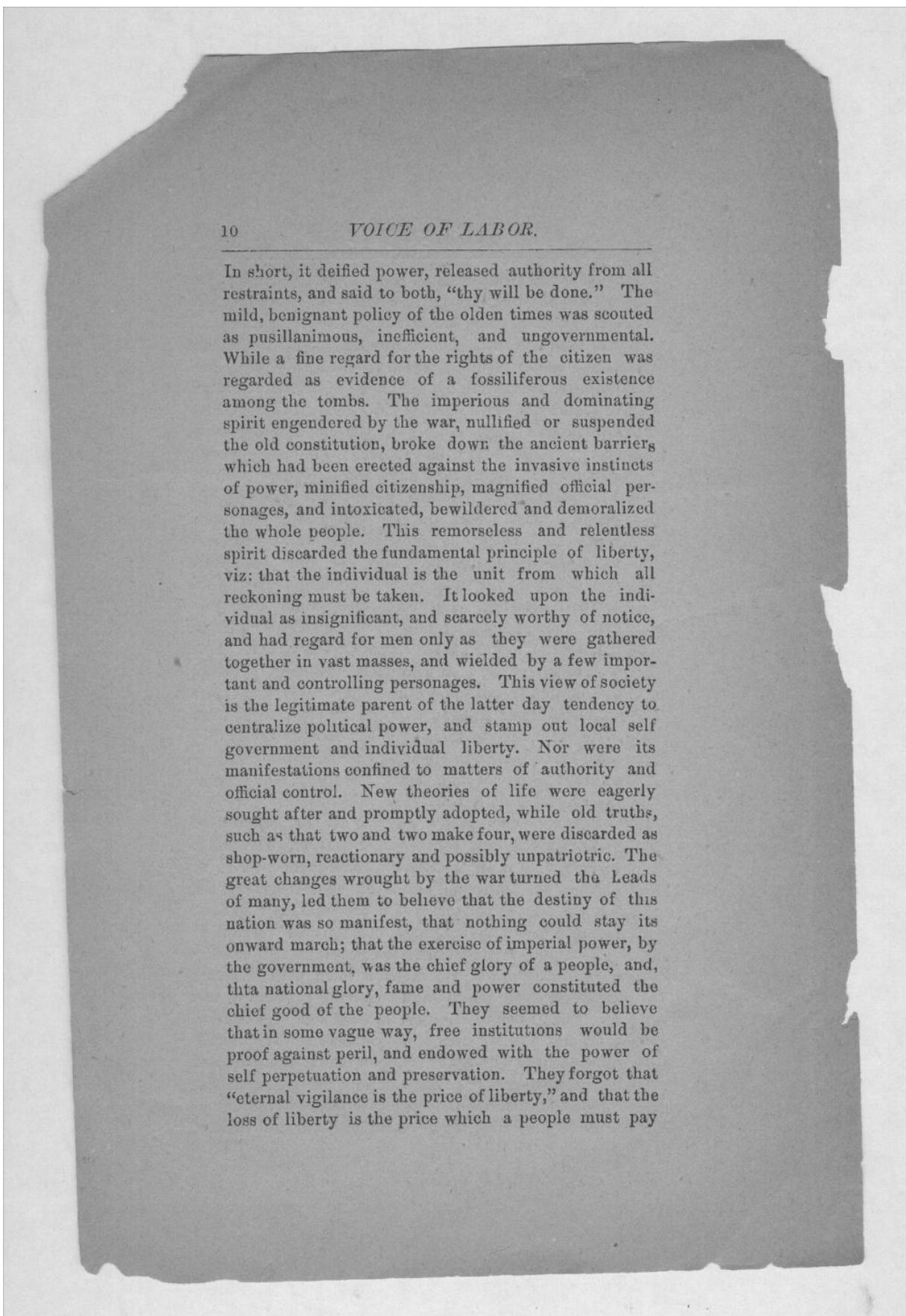
If war ever was just, it was war for the suppression of the slaveholders' rebellion. But it was war, and it carried with it all the terrible consequences of war. It saved the union and abolished chattel slavery, but like the Roman conquests of Greece and Asia, in fact, like all great wars it brought cruelty and corruption in its train. It accustomed the people to the exercise of arbitrary power, familiarized them with military methods, and stern and violent procedure, and reconciled them to the most lawless and high-handed usurpations in the name of patriotism. It brought them to look with approval upon harsh, unlawful and inhuman treatment of their fellow citizens, and educated them into acquiescence in unheard of assumptions of power, by the government over the citizen.

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for the possession of imperial power. They held as enemies of the country, all who doubted, criticized, or warned them of the breakers ahead.

Men of common sense and common honesty were crowded to the rear to give place to latitudinarian schemers and so-called progressists, who proposed that the result was a reign of corruption and peculation, such as the country had never before experienced, which produced, in its turn, financial revulsions, which beggared hundreds of thousands, debauched the nation and revolutionized the ideas and feelings of the people, as to the sanctity of obligations, the claims of honor, and the sacredness of the individual.

Under the influence of these changes, the powerful press and influential personages began to assail the poor, who had been stripped of even the opportunity to earn a livelihood by the manifold blunders, vices and crimes of that predatory and plutocratic society which these powerful forces pandered.

Prompted by this hellish spirit the Chicago *Times* said: "Hand grenades should be thrown among those who are striking to obtain higher wages, as, by such treatment they would be taught a valuable lesson, and other strikers would take warning by their fate."

The Cincinnati *Commercial* said: "One wonders why Matthews wanted to bother himself about the eight hour theory. Should government employees be raised to the rank of favorites and classified for pampering at the public treasury?"

Scribner's Monthly said: He (the tramp) has no right but that which society may see fit of its grace to bestow upon him. He has no more rights than the sow that wallows in the gutter, or the lost dogs, that hover around the city square."

This inhuman utterance calls to mind the poet's despairing cry:

O God, that bread should be so dear,
And flesh and blood so cheap.

It is in strange contrast with the words of him, who said: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of

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the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

And it is a most striking reminder of Robert Burns' great truth, that

Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn.

Henry Ward Beecher said: "Is not a dollar a day enough to buy bread? Water costs nothing, and a man who cannot live on bread and water is not fit to live."

Beecher was not a naturally cruel man, and the fact that he could utter such an atrocious sentiment, shows to what extent the public mind had drifted away from all ideas of justice in the mad tumultuous race for wealth, how completely *man* was ignored and forgotten, and, how insanely mammon was worshiped.

The Reverened Joseph Cook said: "The strongest of this generation wants a dictator. I say come on with your schemes of confiscation and forced loans and graduated income taxes and irredeemable currency, under universal suffrage, and if you are sufficiently frank in proclaiming the doctrines of your ring leaders, then under military necessity and even here in the United States we must get rid of universal suffrage, and we shall. Rather than allow these things we will have one of the fiercest of civil wars."

This bloodthirsty villain could thus flippantly threaten war, but if war should break out he would probably consider it his duty to keep himself in some safe place, while men whose lives were less precious than his own would do the fighting. In the language of the tired and disgusted rebel soldier he would probably consider it "a rich man's war, but a poor man's fight."

The Nevada *Chronicle*, the organ of the late Senator Sharon, said: "We need a stronger government; the wealth of the country demands it. Without capital and capitalists our government would not be worth a fig. The capital of the country demands protection. Its rights are as sacred as the rights of the

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paupers who are continually prating of the encroachments of capital and against centralization. * * * The wealth of the country has to bear the burden of government, and it should control it. Without blood, and rivers of it, there will be no political change of administration. * * * To avert fearful bloodshed, a strong central government should be established as soon as possible."

The New York *Tribune*, said: "The time is near when they (the banks) will feel themselves compelled to act strongly; meanwhile a very good thing has been done; the machinery is now furnished, by which, in any emergency, the financial corporations of the east can act together at a single day's notice with such power that no act of congress can overcome or resist their decision."

The New York *Herald*, with a frankness and sagacity quite commendable; said: "Our people please themselves with the fancy that they are free, because they have the right to meddle a little with politics now and then, in conventions, in legislature and similar places; they chatter and twaddle and scream like so many crows and jays over the eternal principles of freedom as secured in the political fabric. Meanwhile the great economical facts of life, the facts which are and always were the really shaping and controlling forces in the political destinies of a people, sweep rapidly and certainly forward, on lines that indicate the will and movement of a despotic spirit. In that movement a great collision with the popular will is in preparation."

These are but a few of the speeches and publications spoken and published in a similar vein, after the inauguration of the reign of the money power, but they suffice to show the general drift. From the standpoint of the plutocratic press, pulpit and platform, it was but a step to that point, where they were prepared to excuse, justify and defend the suppression of free speech, free press, and the right of peaceable assemblage, when exercised in behalf of those whom

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they had condemned as outside the pale of humanity, and, consequently not entitled to the rights which they themselves enjoyed, and in the enjoyment of which they had uttered and published sentiments incendiary, revolutionary, hostile to popular institutions and our present form of government, and prophesying and threatening its destruction; as, indeed they had a perfect right to do, since ours is in form and theory a free country, and in a free country no language can amount to treason.

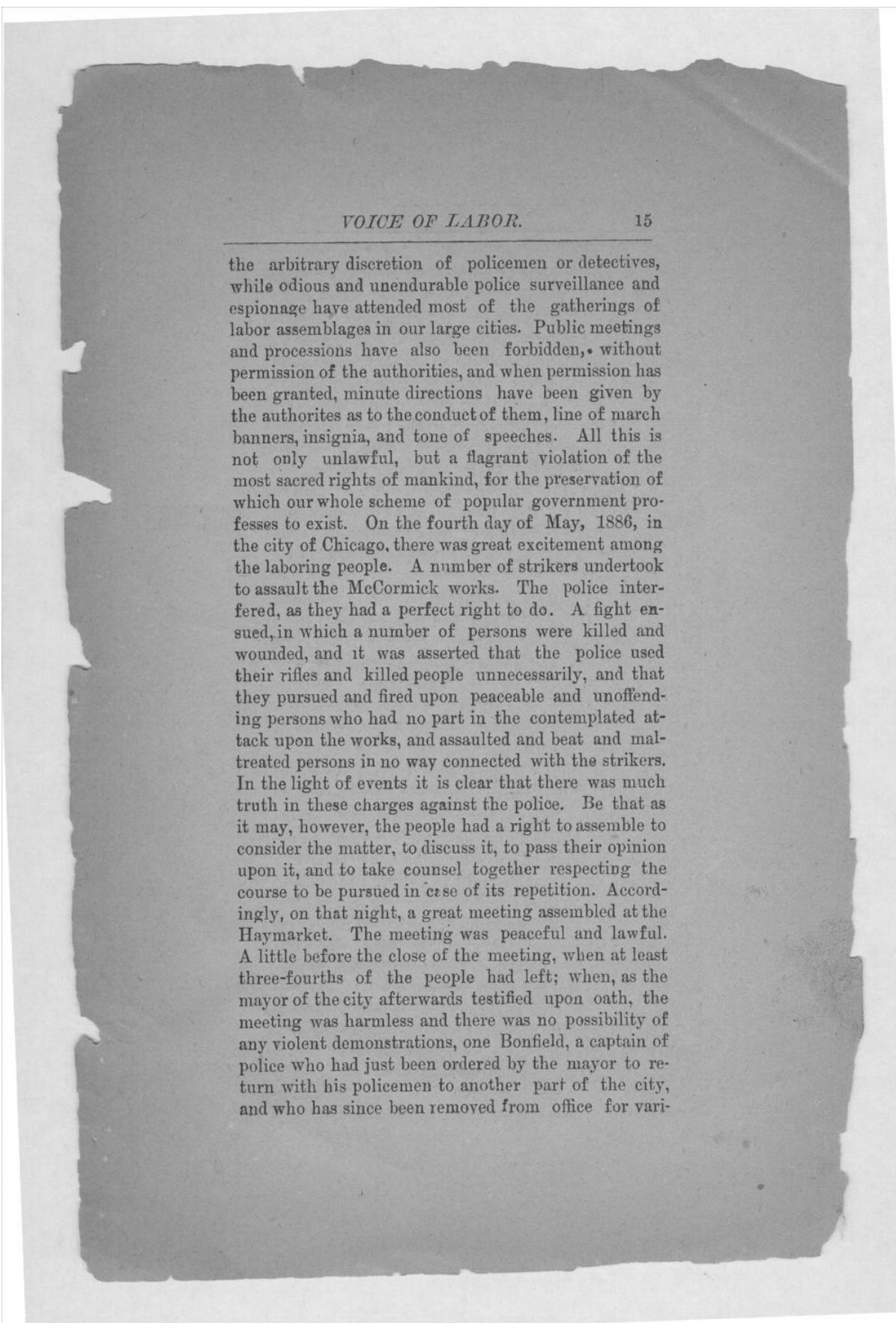
In pursuance of these suggestions of the press, pulpit and platform, and to satisfy the demands of capitalists, who were employers of labor, some of the states passed what are termed conspiracy laws, directly pointed at labor agitators, and assemblages of discontented laborers, in imitation of the conspiracy laws of old colonial days, which had been repealed or become obsolete after the Jeffersonian era of popular liberation and amelioration, which followed the revolutionary war. Under the old combination and conspiracy laws, which were the product of monarchical institutions, if a meeting was held to agitate for higher wages, the constabulary broke up the meeting, and if a procession was formed the leaders were arrested and the procession broken up, as was done in the case of the sailors' strike in New York, in 1802. And, if laborers met, or had private conferences, and took any steps toward organization, they were arrested and prosecuted for combination and conspiracy against the peace and good order of society. Since the revival of these old statutes within the last few years, the methods resorted to to keep down the people have been of the same general nature, with the old-time constabulary, reinforced by the large and ever increasing police of our large cities, and an army of mercenaries wholly unauthorized by law, armed with the most improved fire-arms, and called private detectives, or more commonly Pinkerton detectives. By these forces meetings have been broken up in many instances, labor agitators arrested and put in jail at

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the arbitrary discretion of policemen or detectives, while odious and unendurable police surveillance and espionage have attended most of the gatherings of labor assemblages in our large cities. Public meetings and processions have also been forbidden, without permission of the authorities, and when permission has been granted, minute directions have been given by the authorities as to the conduct of them, line of march banners, insignia, and tone of speeches. All this is not only unlawful, but a flagrant violation of the most sacred rights of mankind, for the preservation of which our whole scheme of popular government professes to exist. On the fourth day of May, 1886, in the city of Chicago, there was great excitement among the laboring people. A number of strikers undertook to assault the McCormick works. The police interfered, as they had a perfect right to do. A fight ensued, in which a number of persons were killed and wounded, and it was asserted that the police used their rifles and killed people unnecessarily, and that they pursued and fired upon peaceable and unoffending persons who had no part in the contemplated attack upon the works, and assaulted and beat and maltreated persons in no way connected with the strikers. In the light of events it is clear that there was much truth in these charges against the police. Be that as it may, however, the people had a right to assemble to consider the matter, to discuss it, to pass their opinion upon it, and to take counsel together respecting the course to be pursued in case of its repetition. Accordingly, on that night, a great meeting assembled at the Haymarket. The meeting was peaceful and lawful. A little before the close of the meeting, when at least three-fourths of the people had left; when, as the mayor of the city afterwards testified upon oath, the meeting was harmless and there was no possibility of any violent demonstrations, one Bonfield, a captain of police who had just been ordered by the mayor to return with his policemen to another part of the city, and who has since been removed from office for vari-

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ous offenses, this Bonfield, in defiance of the order of the mayor, ordered his detachment of police to charge upon the crowd, which was done wholly without any necessity or excuse whatever. It was a most wanton, lawless and dastardly proceeding, and if the crowd had been armed and able to do so, they would have performed their highest duty in fighting the police to the death. They were on their own ground; they were peaceable; they were attending to their own business. The constitution of Illinois guaranteed to them the right to be assembled there and, if it had not, the constitution of the universe and the constitution of human nature did. But they were wholly unorganized, and with the exception of here and there a revolver, as might be the case in any American crowd, they were unarmed.

In the melee a bomb was thrown, or hand grenade, such as the Chicago *Times* had recommended to be thrown into crowds of strikers. Nobody knew who threw the bomb; and nobody knows to this day who threw that bomb. By the explosion Mathias Degan, a policeman, was killed, and seven other policemen were mortally wounded, while a large number of policemen were more or less injured.

A number of labor leaders and agitators were at once arrested, charged with murder and conspiracy to commit murder. Some of these were anarchists, others were socialists, but as a man has as much right to believe in the doctrine of anarchy as he has to believe in Methodism, and as much right to believe in socialism as Catholicism; these matters were in themselves wholly foreign to the question of guilt or innocence, and even, if under any theory of the case, they had been proper to be considered, they constituted no reason why these accused persons were any less entitled to a fair and impartial trial than they would have been had they belonged to the most popular and respectable circle in the city. This, however, the ruling elements of the city of Chicago had decreed they should not have.

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The trial which followed was the most atrocious travesty upon justice ever enacted in this country, a crime against the laws, a burning disgrace to the state of Illinois, and a foul blot upon civilization.

Since the days of the brutal Jeffreys, who held the bloody assizes, no court, in any English-speaking country, has dared to so wantonly and openly trample under foot the maxims, doctrines, principles and practices of the law, and of judicial procedure, as did Judge Gary in this case.

The result was that eight men were convicted. One was sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment and seven were condemned to die. Of these, Ling blew his brains out; Schwab and Fielden apologized to the governor of Illinois for the earnestness with which they had preached their doctrines, and their sentences were commuted to imprisonment for life. The fact that a sort of recantation or renunciation of their views was eagerly seized upon by the governor as an excuse for lessening their punishment, proves that he knew they were not guilty; for, if they had been in fact guilty of the great crime of murder, especially of a murder perpetrated by the use of deadly dynamite, how could the governor have found reason to interfere?

The fact is, that countless petitions were forwarded to Governor Oglesby from all parts of the country asking commutation or pardon for all of the condemned men.

As the day of execution drew near, the whole country was moved with deep anxiety, lest a fatal error—an awful crime—should be committed under the forms of law. Spies, Parsons, Engle and Fischer, while stoutly maintaining their innocence, firmly adhered to their principles to the last, and rejected all propositions of commutation of sentence on condition that they would recant, and were accordingly executed.

On the trial, there was no evidence as to who threw the fatal bomb. No pretense that any of the accused threw it. No evidence that any of them knew who threw it, or that any of them advised any one to throw it. No evidence, in short, that any of these eight condemned men were in any wise connected with the bomb or the throwing of it. Yet they were all condemned after having been denied on their trial every right guaranteed to

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an accused person by the constitution and the laws.

Of the twelve jurors who tried them, ten admitted on oath either that they were prejudiced against the defendants, or had formed or expressed an opinion as to their guilt. While one declared that the fact of their being held for trial was evidence to his mind that they were the guilty parties, and that this opinion would affect his verdict. It was proven, also, that another of the jurors said before the trial, that if he was on the jury he would hang them all, and it was also shown that another juror had said, speaking of Spies, that "he and the whole damned crowd ought to be hung." It was shown, also, that the baiff who summoned the jury, said: "I am managing this case, and I know what I am about. These fellows will hang, as sure as death."

A great deal of evidence was introduced touching the *opinions* of these men, as if a man is to be tried for his *opinions*; also, their speeches were introduced in evidence, made years before to crowds in various parts of the country, where it was impossible that there could have been any thought of what occurred at the Hay-market meeting; also articles written by them for the press were given in evidence when it was known to all that they could have no relation to what occurred at the Hay-market, because it was not known, until after the riot, during the day, that there would be a meeting at the Haymarket that night.

These matters were allowed to go to the jury for the purpose of confirming and deepening their prejudices against the accused. The legislature had a few years before passed one of those old monarchial conspiracy statutes, and this statute was by the court construed to mean substantially, that, if, in a public speech a person uses language against some other person calculated to arouse passion or resentment against him, and some third person inflamed by that speech, without the knowledge or intention of the speaker, does some violence to the party referred to by the speaker, in that case the speaker is guilty of the act, as well as the perpetrator of it, and this, too, though he may never have dreamed of the act; may not know the perpetrator of the act, and may not know that the act has been done.

Under such a rule Roscoe Conkling was as guilty of

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the murder of James A. Garfield as was Charles Guiteau. Under such an interpretation of law no man would even dare to denounce wrong, lest some one hearing him, might do violence to some wrongdoer, and involve the speaker in crime. It was admitted, that there were no American precedents to sustain this view of the law, but it was argued that in state trials in Europe under monarchical governments this practice had been found very satisfactory.

The court in speaking of the defendants in the hearing of the jury, compared them to horsethieves, and in ruling, that men were not disqualified to sit as jurors by reason of prejudice, he insisted in effect, that these would make the fairest jurors because, he said, they would lean against their prejudices. He permitted the states-attorney Grinnell to indulge in the coarsest and most absurd abuse of the defendants, four of whom were far superior to him intellectually, and all of whom were his peers in every other respect. Although the state of Illinois by its constitution, makes the jurors the exclusive judges of the law in a criminal trial, this judge advised the jury, that they should take the law as he gave it to them.

It would require a volume to detail the long list of outrages committed against these defendants by this judge upon the so-called trial. His monstrous mocking of everything righteous, just and lawful; his total, open and conscious disregard of law stands without a parallel in American history. Incredible as it may appear, it is now very generally believed that the jurors were paid a very large sum each for the conviction of these men by the citizens of Chicago.

On August 20th, 1887, the following appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*:

Editor of the Tribune: In view of the long and close confinement endured by the jury in the anarchist trial, and the display of manly courage evidenced by their prompt and fearless verdict, I beg to suggest the propriety of starting a subscription for the purpose of raising at least \$1,000 for the benefit of each jurymen.

I am far from being rich, but would gladly give \$25 for this purpose and will deliver same at your office the day you may start the subscription.—E. C. E.

On the same day, the following appeared in the *Tribune* from another correspondent:

"The long agony is over. Law has triumphed. An-

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archy is defeated. The conspirators have been promptly convicted. Let them be as promptly punished. The twelve good men and true, whose honesty and fearlessness made a conviction possible, should not be forgotten. They have performed their unpleasant duty without flinching. Let them be generously remembered—raise a fund, say \$100,000 to be presented with thanks of a grateful people.—*E. A. Mulford.*

A certain N. B. Ream also proposed to head the list with \$500.

Judge Gary in discharging the jury, said, among other things: "It does not become me to say anything in regard to the case that you have tried or the verdict you have rendered; but as men compulsorily serving as jurors, as you have done, deserve some recognition of the service you have performed besides the meager compensation you are to receive. You are discharged from further attendance upon this court. I understand that some carriages are in attendance to convey you from this place."

Ah, indeed! Here we have it all! Capital ready to pay for the verdict, and the judge who sat at the trial fully aware of the fact!

Impossible as it may appear this outrage upon human rights, this mockery of justice, was sustained and upheld by the supreme court of Illinois in an opinion that will stand, while it does stand, as a monument of judicial falsehood, corruption, degradation and despotism, a source of humiliation and sorrow to every true lawyer, and a solemn warning to the people to put no man on the bench who is not in sympathy with them in their never-ending struggle with power. The supreme court of the United States having held that it had no jurisdiction in the case, and General Butler having before that court pronounced the Chicago trial anarchy itself, on the 11th of November 1887, the four who remained under sentence of death were judicially assassinated, and deliberately murdered under the form of law. The horrible deed cast a gloom over the working people of whole land, and of the whole world. To millions of hearts it brought doubt as to the man's attainment to better conditions. To thousands it brought despair, and to thousands of others a feeling that it was their solemn duty to resist to any extremity the further prostitution of law in the name of law.

But, says some one, why do you bring up this matter

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now? Do you endorse anarchy? No! Do you endorse socialism? No! But I endorse justice and liberty. Because the purpose of this meeting is to agitate for the reduction of the hours of labor, and the excitement which preceded and culminated in the Haymarket affair was the result of the great eight hour movement of 1886, is why I bring this matter up now, I refer to these matters to show you, that as matters stand, your proposed agitation for a reduction of the hours of labor may find itself limited by the lawless interference of those in authority. What has happened in the past may happen again, if you will permit it.

If you desire to better the condition of the people by agitation, the first step is to assure yourself that you will not be denied the right to agitate, to secure beyond a peradventure the uninterrupted exercise of your constitutional right of peaceful assemblage, free speech, and free press; yea, free as the winds of Heaven for less than this is not freedom. This you cannot expect while public opinion condemns to life-imprisonment men whose only offense was, that they contended for better conditions for the people. The same public opinion which condemns them will condemn you if the necessities of organized capital require it. While they remain in prison you will remain in chains. Whether you agree with their views or not, your cause is their cause, and their cause is your cause. They are not imprisoned for crime; they are imprisoned for opinions sake—for having dared to assail the capitalistic plutocratic despotism which now holds this whole country in its grasp, and which will never release its grasp until compelled to do so.

Until a public sentiment is formed sufficiently potent to open wide the iron door of the Joliet prison and bid Schwab, Fielden and Niebe go free you need expect but little improvement of your condition, because the fundamental condition of improvement will be wanting, viz: a feeling of absolute freedom to say what you please respecting questions of capital and labor.

When that happy day shall come; when the accursed conspiracy laws shall be swept away; when organized bands of lawless murderers shall no longer be tolerated; when the cities are relieved of the despotism of a state-

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