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## Harmony and Unity and Its Limits (April 12, 1897)

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Terre Haute, Ind., April 12, 1897.

Rarely has so large a body of men as were engaged in the Leadville strike acted in all matters with such harmony and unanimity. I was particularly struck by this feature of the strike. During all the time I was at Leadville I never heard a single complaint. There was confidence in the leaders and mutual confidence among the members; and, feeling that they were battling in a righteous cause, they stood by one another as if bound together by hoods of steel. There is in this a beautiful lesson for those who are capable of rising above selfish and sordid influences and appreciating an exhibition of devotion to principle and fidelity to fellow man.

As I write these lines I remember the statements that were made and often repeated about the strike having been instigated by a few red-mouthed agitators. All the charge until the curtain fell upon the scene. A more flagrant falsehood was never uttered. It may be that those who made the charge repeated it so often that they themselves believed it, but there was not a scintilla of truth in it. In declaring the strike and carrying it forward, the men at all times *acted for themselves*. Whether the strike was wise or otherwise, the great body of the men ordered it by acclamation, and to this day not one of them can be found to avow the contrary, and to declare that it was precipitated by a few demagogues against the better judgment of the majority is to pervert the truth and insult the intelligence of men. I dwell particularly upon this point, for I know by bitter experience at what a disadvantage men are placed who are the victims of falsehood and misrepresentation at such a critical time. The "gullible public" is led to believe that the strike was wholly uncalled for, that it was incited by a few irresponsible creatures who are enemies of society and monsters of depravity, and while, perhaps, they may express some sympathy for the strikers for being so easily misled, they are almost invariably against the

strike and mass all their powers to crush it, not as much as dreaming that in so doing they are simply digging their own graves.

The agitator, the leader, the pathfinder has in every age paid the penalty imposed by the hosts of ignorance and superstition upon all self-sacrificing, sympathetic souls that ever sought to free and ennoble the race. Jesus Christ, the "Man of Sorrow," was nailed to the cross; Socrates was forced to drink the fatal hemlock; Columbus was chained in a dungeon as if he were a wild beast. Were it required, the list could be made as long as the track of the human race. Years, sometimes centuries after they are dust, monuments are reared above them in grateful memory of their service to mankind. Living, they are denounced as demagogues, and dead, they are metamorphosed into demigods, and the world pays them the tribute of its profoundest reverence. This has always been the way, and we have no reason to believe that a time will come when it will be otherwise. The only reason given why this should be so is that

God moves in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform.<sup>i</sup>

Taking a backward look, I am persuaded that the differences between the miners and the mine managers could have been easily adjusted had there been a mutual disposition to do so. It is safe to say, in the light of the fearful proportions to which the strike expanded and the loss of life and property, the paralysis of business and the suffering and distress which followed, that if it were to do over again the strike would not be called, and it is equally safe to assume that the mine managers, as well as the miners, would go liberally half way to prevent it. And this is one of the important lessons of the strike which it is to be hoped will be heeded by all.

From the testimony brought before the legislative committee,<sup>ii</sup> and from the evidence which came to me personally, I am satisfied that the trouble had been "brewing" a long time, that from small beginnings the situation became more serious and the relations more strained until mutual ugliness developed and made anything like reasonable consideration of the existing differences next to impossible. The miners were organized. So were the mine managers, the latter letting the example. The mine managers, some of them at least, bought large numbers of guns and transformed their mines into forts and arsenals long before the strike was declared,

while the miners made no purchase of arms until after the strike was on. The report of the legislative committee says:

The evidence shows that at the time of the strike the manager of the Little Johnny had about twelve rifles and five shotguns at the mine and 150 rifles which had been purchased on a former occasion, but which were not then at the mine; that immediately after the Coronado affair he purchased an additional 150 rifles and sent the 300 to the Little Johnny mine and armed and drilled the non-union men he was importing from Missouri to work in the mine.

That the Coronado mine, a year before the strike, had built an eight foot fence of one-inch boards around its premises, which occupied an area of about 200 feet square; and that early in August the owners of the Coronado constructed inside of and about six feet from the fence; that some time before the Coronado attack, the Emmet and RAM built a fence around their premises, and the Emmet also covered the tramway crossing the road with boards containing portholes and made other preparations.

In such a struggle workingmen are always at a disadvantage, and the odds are nearly always against them. They are so poor, and there are so many of them. Their surplus earnings, if any they have, are soon consumed. On the other hand, their employers are few in number and usually rich, or at least far above the "immediate want" line. They and their families can eat three times a day and fare comfortably for an indefinite period. They are shrewd, smart men. They meet in a small room and plan in secret and there is no danger of a paid emissary from the other side getting into their council and betraying their secrets. They understand the conditions that confront the strikers: that it is entirely a question of the stomach and that starvation will determine the contest, and give them the victory, and so they simply — wait.

How different the situation with the workingmen? There is an army of them and they are more or less poor and without resources. When their wages cease, hunger begins, and a hunger pang gnawing at his child will take the courage out of the strongest man, or drive him to desperation, one or the other. To feed and clothe and shelter this army, vastly augmented by the women and children who are dependent upon them, requires daily an enormous outlay. The organization under whose banner they are struggling responds nobly, but being composed wholly of wage laborers, most

of whom have all they can do to provide for their own families, the drain severely taxes the resources of the order and soon their "relief," upon which the life of the strike depends, has to be suspended and ignominious surrender is all that is left to the hapless strikers.

Another great disadvantage is that they make no plans that are not instantly communicated to the other side. They have got to take the whole big crowd into their confidence and they might as well hold their meetings on the public square, for the spies, spotters, and sneaks of the corporations are always in their meetings and report fully everything that is done and every move that is contemplated. Many of their number are ignorant and suspicious and can be easily persuaded that their leaders are designing knaves and getting rich out of the strike; or they can be arrayed against one another, or, worse still, influenced to desert their brethren, return to work, and turn against their former comrades by aiding to defeat them, sink all to the depths of slavery and degradation.

Then, again, every violation of law, every criminal act committed during a strike is charged upon the strikers. No matter though they be totally innocent. The press grossly exaggerates every incident that is calculated to prejudice and influence the public, and often lies outright to accomplish this end. Labor, having no press that reaches the great public, must submit in silence. Thus "public sentiment," often brutally ignorant and misdirected, turns upon the struggling, suffering poor, smites them to the earth, and plants its remorseless heels in their emaciated, prostrate bodies.

In the Great Railroad Strike of 1894 the riots were incited, the fires were started, and innocent people were shot by the murderous minions of the railroad corporations, but all this was charged upon the strikers, and it lost them the strike and sent them to jail. The proof is simply overwhelming. Only a few days ago William Bloom, who was arrested at Cleveland, Ohio, for arson, confessed that while serving as a militiaman at Chicago in 1894, during the Pullman strike, he set fire to a grain elevator and more than 50 railroad cars, and that he had committed similar atrocities under similar circumstances at a number of other points.

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<sup>i</sup> Opening lines of the hymn “God Moves in a Mysterious Way” (1774) by William Cowper (1731-1800).

<sup>ii</sup> A special committee was named by the 11th Colorado Legislative Assembly to investigate the circumstances of the Leadville strike. It published its findings as *Report of the Joint Special Legislative Committee of the Eleven General Assembly on the Leadville Strike* (1897).