
Is a Wrong Done to One the Concern of All?

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We should find it extremely difficult to formulate a more important question for the consideration of workingmen than is presented in the caption of this article.

If a wrong done to one is not the concern of all, it can be said that the wrong scarcely, if at all, concerns any one but the victim of the wrong, and with such a conclusion the term “brotherhood” loses its significance, its strength, and glory — is reduced to a level with pagan gods, to be worshiped by the ignorant and deluded, that the priests, who serve the idol and formulate its oracles, may fatten and flourish upon the superstitions of their victims. If a wrong done to one is not the concern of all, then the talk about the “brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God” is not only a miserable delusion, worse than

Dead sea fruits, that tempt the eye,
But turn to ashes on the lips.¹

but is embellished hypocrisy, robed phariseism, decorated delusion, unworthy of any recognition in the ranks of sane men.

If a wrong done to one is not the concern of all, why should men waste their breath in shouting:

When the war-drums throb no longer,
And when the battle flags are furled,
In the parliament of man,
The federation of the world?²

¹ From *Lalla Rookh* (1817), by **Thomas Moore** (1779-1852).

² From “Locksley Hall” (1842), by **Alfred Tennyson** (1809-1892).

If the theory is “every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost,” why not admit that man has been evolved from the hog, rather than contend that God made him “a little lower than Himself,” which is the reading of the “new version” of the Bible? To sing of the “federation of the world,” is “flim flam,” poetic nonsense, unworthy of consideration, if it be untrue that a wrong done to one is the concern of all.

All nations, worthy of the name, pagan as well as Christian, admit that a wrong done to one of their humblest citizens, or subjects, concerns the nation. It is a fundamental principle, without which a nation, however boastful of its power or enlightenment, would sink to soundless depths of contempt — a weak nation, when one of its citizens is subject to injury cannot redress the wrong, *vi et armis*,³ it can only protest, plead for its rights, and appeal to other nations for sympathy and aid, but when a citizen of a great and powerful nation is subjected to wrong, the case is different. History is full of illustrations.

During the “late unpleasantness,”⁴ an obscure man, a British subject, long resident in the South, being in Louisville, Kentucky, gave expression to what were regarded treasonable sentiments, and was forthwith arrested and imprisoned. He was without wealth or high social standing, but he appealed to the British Minister at Washington, and forthwith an order came for his release. The wrong that he claimed had been done him at once concentrated upon his case, the power of the British empire — and acting promptly, he walked out of his prison a free man.

Not long since an American citizen was wrongfully confined in a loathsome Mexican prison. When he appealed to his government, he challenged its power to right the wrong, and his prison doors were thrown open, and he was permitted to again tread the sod of his country. Even China, appealed to the United States to redress the wrongs done to some of the subjects of the Celestial Kingdom, and though their lives could not be restored, the loss of property was

³ “By force of arms.”

⁴ That is, the American Civil War.

made good from the Federal exchequer.⁵ Nor is the date remote, when an adopted citizen of the United States visiting his old European home was incarcerated, and held for military duty. The fact becoming known to a commander of an American warship, at the port where the citizen was deprived of his liberty, a demand was made upon the authorities for his release, and that there might be no mistake about it, the ship was brought broadside to the town, his guns shotted and run out, and decks cleared for action. The demand was "Send the American citizen on board, place him under the protection of the flag of his country or take the consequences." The wrong done Martin Costa, was an injury to the American nation, and the American nation stood pledged and ready to redress the wrong. As a result, the imprisoned man was released.⁶ It would be easy to multiply illustrations, but it is not required. The principle is well settled, and is vital.

How stands the account with American workingmen? In the vast army of unorganized labor in the United States, who recognizes any wrong done to one as being an injury to all? Who protests in the name of Christ, or, in the name of the Christian's God? Does the state? Does the church? Does the ermined Judge? Go search the chronicles, and if you find one solitary instance of the kind, in the name of all things sacred let it go forth to the world.

The fact that unorganized workingmen were the victims of wrongs, flagrant and ceaseless, suggested organization as a remedy. The organization became the parliament of workingmen. If one of the members of the organization was wronged it became the concern of all the members, and all protested. This organization of workingmen is not of recent date, and history demonstrates that protection from wrongs and oppressions was secured through the influence of the guilds, organized centuries before the discovery of America.

⁵ As part of a 1888 treaty between the United States and China restricting immigration a total of \$276,619 was allotted to compensate Chinese citizens who had been injured by violence in the United States.

⁶ In July 1853 Martin Costa, a Hungarian refugee who had taken out first papers for citizenship in the United States, was arrested at the Greek city of Smyrna and held in the brig of an Austrian warship for transportation home for trial. The American warship *St. Louis* intercepted the Austrian vessel prior to its departure, heeding claims that that Costa was due the protection of the American flag. A day of consular diplomatic negotiation followed, with Costa finally released to the custody a third party, thereby avoiding deportation.

It was doubtless true then as now, that a wrong done to one shoemaker, AD 1157, was regarded as an injury to any other member of the guild, but there is no intimation that the wrong done to a shoemaker was an injury to the members of every other guild. Then as now, if the guild of which the wronged shoemaker was a member, was strong enough to redress the grievance, it was done, if not the wrong triumphed and the right was cloven down. The "injury to all" simply meant, an injury to all the members of that particular organization.

Since the middle ages, however much we may boast of the progress of civilization, the brotherhood idea of all workingmen has made little progress, perhaps more in the last decade, than in all the centuries past, and yet, so little as to create only a glimmering hope, that the declaration, as true as any that Jehovah ever inspired, that "a wrong done to one, is an injury to all," is finally to triumph over ignorance, prejudice and all other obstacles.

It is history that the guilds of the middle ages, organized to protect the poor from oppression, growing in numbers, in wealth, and power, became at last aristocratic and oppressive, and in numerous instances, the same tendency is observable today in the United States of America.

Within the whole realm of the ridiculous and the repulsive there is nothing more revolting than to see one workingman treating another workingman with haughty disdain, caring no more for the wrong done him than if it had been inflicted upon a beast, and all, because his work is in another department of the world's industries. As certainly as the fact of interdependence exists, as certainly is a wrong done to one, the concern of all. Obscured it may be, ignored it may be, but still it remains immutable and eternal, nor will workingmen achieve a complete triumph over their oppressors until it is recognized, emblazoned upon their banners, and becomes their shibboleth.

The demand for federation, means that a wrong done one is the concern of all. In federation there is hope. Without it, the hopes of workingmen will be deferred until every heart will be sick. In federation envy, which is the bane of organizations will disappear, and as federation proceeds, as education goes forward, thoughts will go deeper and higher, and will eventually include the humblest toiler. Then when a wrong is inflicted upon workingmen in mine or shop, the knowledge of the fact shall be recognized as an injury to all. In

this there is nothing utopian. We have furnished illustrations of the practical working of governmental power, and if the trend of workingmen's thoughts is in that direction the world has a right to be hopeful.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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