
Conditions

by Eugene V. Debs

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Our attention is called to an article in the Christian Union, by Rev. George Thomas Dowling, D.D.,¹ in which the learned divine (?) brings his love to bear upon the rich and the poor, his purpose being to persuade the poor that after all they are as happy as the rich and should therefore be contented with their lot. Those who read the meditations of the pious D.D. will readily see that his anxieties circle around the rich — and his solicitude is so pronounced that it is more than probable his salary will be raised. The rich man, this ambassador of the “King of Kings” assumes may “step up or down at will, while the poor must be content with what chance offers for bettering their condition.” What the *chances* are for the poor to better their condition the Rev. Dowling, D.D., fails to point out, but he tells his readers that “nothing but his own inclination prevents the rich man from making himself a pauper,” while “inclination does not solve the problem for the poor man.” The poor man, manifestly, has no inclination to make himself poorer — and God knows, in thousands of instances he could not, if he had the inclination — and if he has an inclination to rise he must wait for a chance. Inclination is of little consequence to him, and in a vast majority of cases where a *chance* arises, someone gets in ahead and the poor still languish waiting for another chance to rise.

The theory of the Rev. Dowling, D.D., suggests a scrap of divine history, where we deem it worthwhile to reproduce in this connection as it illustrates that some centuries ago, another *force* than “chance” made its appearance as follows:

¹ **George Thomas Dowling** (1849-1928), was a prominent Baptist cleric and author of several published collections of sermons, including the 1917 work, *The Rich Man's Poverty and the Poor Man's Wealth: And Other Practical Talks*.

Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep *market* a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue, Bethesda, having five porches.

In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: Whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatever disease he had.

And a certain man was there which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.

When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time *in that case*, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole.

The impotent man answered him. Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming another steppeth down before me.

Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed and walk.²

The incident discloses a new departure in human affairs — a new force — things that the Rev. Dowling, D.D., fails to see. It no longer requires that an angel should come down and trouble the waters that men may be cured of their infirmities. Everywhere the waters are troubled — and a voice says to every poor man, every workingman, “Rise,” and in obedience to the command they are rising. They are not waiting for chances and opportunities, but are creating them. Every lodge room is a Bethesda — and even an infirm *scab* may be cured of his diseases, and be redeemed from corporation slavery.

The rich, for whom the titled fat-salaries clergy are so exceedingly solicitous, may not like the command to “rise,” which workingmen are heading and obeying, but their antagonism is losing its potency. the inclination of workingmen is finding practical means for assertion. They are no longer waiting for someone to put them into the pool; by the mighty force of organization, they go in — and confident of the righteousness of their cause, they are prepared to fight a good fight for the emancipation of labor; they are prepared to “withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.”³

The platitudes of the pulpit, the degeneracy of the church, the debauchery of legislatures, the corruptions of high life, the arrogance of the rich will not swerve them from their course — animated by the

² *John*, King James version, chapter 5, verses 2-8.

³ A phrase from Ephesians, KJV, chapter 6, verse 13.

declaration of the “carpenter’s son,” who said, “My father worketh hitherto and I work,”⁴ they will work on and work ever, work if required, as do the corals who lay the foundations of continents in the depths of the sea, and build until their superstructure rises above the waves and is clothed in eternal verdure.

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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⁴ A phrase from *John*, KJV, chapter 5, verse 17.