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The struggle of the ages

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"The struggle of the Ages." 181

K. A. Lent.

In a late work on insect life & habits, Sir John Lubbock informs us that, in Ant communities, all matters pertaining to the architecture of their homes, are conducted on plans which have been handed down from time immemorial - without the slightest deviation being permitted therefrom. If, in any community, there appears some reckless Iconoclast who dares presume that the old manner of building may be improved upon; if he endeavors to inaugurate new methods, the innovation is not tolerated for a moment.

But the rage of the community rush upon him, & put him to death with a unanimity which proves conclusively that in Ant. life at least, old landmarks are to be respected.

And yet, despite their sad fate, these innovators are constantly appearing, & the community is continually rent by this struggle between Radical Energy & conservative faithfulness.

The animal ~~life~~ ^{process} about us seems often to be a mere shadowy type of the higher life of man.

The same ambitions & passions the same hopes & fears in a lower order & lesser degree seem to actuate those creatures about us which have not attained to man's supremacy, & nothing, surely, can more clearly set forth this resemblance than this list of Natural history to which we have just referred.

Man, as supreme lord of Creation, would hardly acknowledge a bond of likeness uniting him to the tiny worker

who crosses his path in Summer,
 & rears his mansion. only that
 it may be crushed by man's
 heavy footfall; & yet. who can
 read the history of the ages
 without feeling that the ant
 struggle furnishes more than an
 idle vanity of the struggle which
 has been going on in the world
 since history first began between
 that spirit which clings to the
old as something worthy of
 supreme reverence & that other
 spirit which values the old
 only as it leads to the ever greater
new;

The radical & conservative
 tendencies of humanity! In every
 eye, & in every individual ^{life}, they
 have been found in a seeming
 by hopeless antagonism; and
 the great problem of the world
 to-day seems to be the reconcili-
 ation of the two; that these ten-
 dencies, alike given us of God

may take their place in man's normal development, neither over-
slighting the other; & that man-
kind about us may no longer
be divided into the ~~two~~ mutually
exclusive ranks of the "hot-headed
Radical" & the "cool blooded Con-
servative"; but ~~that~~ blended
into one, there may result the
phenomenon of a perfectly de-
veloped manhood.

But, Alas! so far has man's
moral equilibrium been dis-
turbed that the reconciliation
seems far in the future! The
ranks to-day are sharply de-
fined. As in the Ant. commu-
nity the Conservative force greatly
outnumbers the Radical -

here also the Radical cause
is the cause of progress & innov-
ation, & here to the Radical
is made to feel the full force
of social ostracism.

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In using the word "Radical", we deem it best, first, to define our meaning, or, rather, to give the necessary limitations to the term.

It has come, in that uncessant degradation which seems to be the fate of language as well as man - to be considered a synonym for fanaticism & lawlessness. The

Radical is considered as a man who, with a reckless vandalism, tears down existing customs without regard to their worth or necessity, & who takes no steps towards the rearing of new & better structures. Radicalism is not Nihilism, though, in the thought of many, it seems of kindred birth. In the true Radical there is over enough of the Conservative to cause him to cling tenaciously to the essentially necessary & good. But he differs from the mere Conservative in that he hastens to abandon

the unnecessary & evil & gives no
head to the claims for continuance
which the mere fact of present
existence urges.

For him the "golden age" lies
not in the dim past, but in the
ever brightening future.

Lord Sherbrooke has given
four marks of the liberal - or
radical statesman, which will
serve ^{equally} as well for the Radical
in any department of life's la-
bor.

1st. He hopes more from the good
in human nature than he fears
from the evil.

2^d. He looks to the embodiment
of great principles, rather than
to manipulations by rule of
thumb.

3^d. He subordinates local to
national advantages.

4. He respects institutions, not
because they have been & are

but because they ought to be.

Taken with this interpretation it seems to me that the word Radical - or Liberal is a synonym of all that is best & truest in humanity: of the side of progress, as against retrogression - of truth as against falsehood - of the Future as against the Past.

What is he indeed but a "root" man; one who delves to the very center of things - who seeks to know things as they are - not as they seem? He is Carlyle's own hero the "sincere man" & he is called upon to wage a perpetual battle with all that is insincere & false.

He accepts as his creed Lowell's grand lines - that

"New occasions teach new duties; -
Time makes ancient good uncouth;
They must upward still, & onward,
Who would keep abreast of Truth."
Lo, before us gleam her camp-fires!
For ourselves must Pilgrims be,

Launch our Mayflower, & steer boldly
Through the desperate wintry sea,
Nor attempt the Future's portal
With the Past's blood-rotted key!"

It is true that Radicalism may
degenerate into mere lawlessness.

Alas! that the world's history should
prove this. too often. to have been
the case! But this is not its nec-
essary, nor its normal outcome.

So long as Conservatism has
been perverted into a blind cling-
ing to the old - without regard
to its utility - so long must the
spirit which is set to oppose this
be liable to a perversion, & the
perversion of Radicalism must
ever be in proportion to the
intolerance of Conservatism.

Nevertheless, despite its perva-
sive, despite its storms of
irrevelent violence & its
French Revolutionary - the spirit
of Radicalism stills lives

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& with it & in it, lives the world's
future hope.

But the conflict of the ages
has ever been the struggle of
the Radical against the Conser-
vative. To see this as we turn
our eyes back upon history's re-
motest pages. In every land &
among every people that faculty
which was given as the vice con-
servator of truth became perverted
& gains so far the ascendancy as
to turn the eyes of men steadfastly
against any new truth. That which
is is revered & gradually the
mere fact of being claims supreme
honour. The inner spiritual mean-
ing which can alone make outward
forms of worth. ~~comes~~^{is} lost.

Formalism, bigotry, hypocrisy -
a hideous insincerity becomes
the condition of this people.

Then suddenly some brave soul
revolts against all this seeming
& seeks the real. The Radical

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appears. "These forms!" he says. "what are they but idle symbols stripped of all true life? These Gods they are wood & clay. useless. lifeless powerless to aid you!". He throws them down from their high places & brings back again the spiritual significance which they have lost. It was thus that Elijah appeared on Mt. Carmel. It was thus that Isaiah & Jeremiah came years after. Thus Mahomet aroused the Arabian people to a new life. & Buddha breathed a new inspiration into the dying creed of the Hindus.

It was thus that the God-man came into the world.

What was the life of the man Christ Jesus if not a life of radical revolt against existing conventions? He came to a people. aye. to a world; whom the letter had long since killed.

who were living ^{!!} on the dry husks
of formalism & whose highest
idea of truth & authority were com-
prised in the words - "It is written".

The law was obeyed, not because
of any inner spiritual significance
which made it worthy of obedience
but because it had been "given by
Moses".

Christ met this
spirit as the true reformer has
ever met it & with a marvelous
gentleness, & an equally mar-
velous courage he set about his
work of tearing down the old &
establishing the new. He showed
the inner life at the heart of each
old tradition; he emancipated
man from the many weights of
custom & ritual which had be-
come unbearable, because stripped
of its soul-meaning; he affirmed
man to be greater than the Sabbath
greater than any existing code
or ceremonial law; he proclaimed
a freedom which the truth should

bring into each life & which should
 make ^{each} man his own priest & law giver
 under the Divine illuminating sent
 from God. And his fate - his
 manly speaking - was only the fate
 of the Radical reformer as against
 the conservative power of Ch. & State

If Jesus ^{the man} had been less a Radical
 the Cross need not have been the
 result of his work. If he had
 glossed over the deeds of a cor-
 rupt hierarchy; if he had met
 the conciliatory advances which
 they were at first disposed to make
 towards him; if he had lent his
 voice to their aggrandisement - or
 his silence to their faults -
 well! - he would not have been
 the Christ & the world would
 not have known it's new life -
 but he might have been a great
 & honored Rabbi & founded a
 new sect of Hebrew conservatives.
 But he met his tower, with

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once fleeing from his work,
& his home met him in the form
of the Cross.

And the Cross has been the
fate of all Radicals throughout
all history. & it is their fate to die.

The man or woman who dares
boldly to face existing prejudices
- who refuses to bow down before the
God of custom; who cries against
it as did Knox against the image
of the Virgin that it is a mere
"pentel breed" & consigns it to the
fate of "swimming" rather than
of worship - that man, or that wo-
man will be made in some way
to feel the power of this God. Custom
at some point in the life path
the cross must be faced.

Ah: a long line of witnesses
come forth to answer to this sen-
tence - brave souls who have poured
themselves out fully in the cause
of truth. An Athanasius & an
Augustine: A Dante & a Savonarola

orola! a Peter Weldon & a Hesse!
 A Luther & a Knox! A Latimer & a
 Ridley. A Joan of Arc & a Madama
 Guyon! We need not multi-
 ply their names - each age has
 produced them - & from the low-
 ly prison cells where their lives
 were trodden - from the ~~many~~ ^{many}
 epiles which have been theirs.

from the bitter social ostracism
 & contumely which they were
 forced to bear - from scaffold &
 from stake - they all give in the
 same testimony - a testimony
 which has been written in blood
 & branded in flame. that "if any
 man will come after me" -
 in the sense of living out life -
 "he must deny himself & take
 up his cross & follow me".

Nor does the Past alone bear
 this record. The age of intolence
 and has not passed away with
 the Inquisition - nor does the

arrogance of supreme power set
alone with the Pope of Rome.

One American nation dis-
tinctly a Republic & given up
to the full rights of the individual
citizens is, nevertheless not with-
out it's demagogues. it's aristoc-
ratic, it's hierarchic.

The god of Customs is here, to
worshipped & he who calls out
upon it as a "pentid breed" is
made to feel. if not the thumb-
screw & the Engineer's rack -
at least, the more excruciating
torment of the sarcastic smile,
the elevated brow, the averted
shoulder & all the agony which
social ostracism alone can
bring to the sensitive soul.

The great Anti-slavery move-
ment. began among the rebel-
lings of the mob & the contempt
of higher circles - continued
through years of opposition &
persecution, until, at last, it

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culminated in the white face of
John Brown as he hung in the
gallows & in the cruel war which
deluged our land in blood -
is not the only instance which
might be alleged. Everywhere
has the path of progress been
hedged up by conservative re-
strictions & it has only been as
resolute men have bravely torn
down all obstacles that the path
has been laid which is - some
day, to become the "Kings high-
way of holiness".

Now is it with the state, alone
that this opposition exists.

The Church of God, left as a light
in the world, ordained to be the
advance guard in the great
march of progress - to kindle
the beacon fires of truth which
shall illumine the world - that
Church, too often has hidden
its light under a bushel -

has hedged up the paths of progress -
 has quenched the beacon flames
 of truth & remanded the world
 to a longer duration of darkness &
 evil. Whenever the Reformer has
 appeared the lay has put the
 questions of centuries ago - "Have
 any of the rulers - or the Pharisees
 believed on him"?

It is hardly a matter to excite wonder
 that Philanthropists - men who have
 given up their lives to some social
 as a Garrison or a Wendell Phillips
 reform, are almost invariably in
 opposition to the visible Church.

They know from bitter experience
 how in the hour of their sorest need
 that Church has been - a dead
 weight upon their hands. Faint
 hearted ministers have refused
 to speak the truth - time serving
 members have shrunk from
 compromising their personal
 interests & to give the Church
 has come upon advanced
 ground only as it has been pushed
 by the advancing moral senti-
 ment of Society at large.

May. it is grandly true. that as
 Christ was the "light & the life of
 of the world" is all great moral
 reforms have sprung from the
spirit of Christianity - from some
 individual whose life has been in-
 fused with it's power. Usually - to
 he has had a place within the
 pale of the visible Ch. - but he
 has been there as a Radical re-
 former. While the Church as a
 body has been the conservative
 element which has opposed his
 reforms. It is useless for us
 to close our eyes to this fact - We
 cannot but see the assertion. We need
 only look back to the Reformation
 - to the origin of Methodism - to
 the anti-slavery reform - nay -
 we need not look beyond our own
 day. We have only to see how the
 Church of Christ - committed
 to the great work of dissemina-
 ting his Gospel. is closing it's

drove against souls associated with
 the Divine power. & sent forth to the
 great work of "preaching the Word"
 is refusing to grant them sanc-
 tion in their work. not because
 of any mental or moral unfit-
 ness. but, because, forsooth they
 are women. Leaving the spirit
 of the Apostolic command they
 are clinging to it & mere letters.
 & without pausing reverently
 to inquire whether "this work be
 of God": they are resolutely
 determining that it shall "come
 to naught." Alas, that the
 Christian ministry - in the year
 of our Lord 1881. should fail
 to have as broad a spirit of toler-
 ance as had Moses - that true
 Radical - when ages ago he
 cried out. "Enquire thou for my
 sake: Would God that all the
 Lord's people were prophets & that
 the Lord would put His Spirit
 upon them!" !

And still the struggle of the eye
 goes on! The poor little art &
 discourse new plans: ~~struggling~~
~~with~~ - a higher - grander
 architecture than his brethren
 have known become attainable.

& straightway he is seized upon
 overmastered by numbers & put
 to death; with this great difference
 however, between him & his insect
 kindred that, while the art's
 plans die with him, the man's
 live after him & gradually
 permeate the thought & lives of
 the very men who were most vig-
 orous in their opposition & thus
 throughout all the ages - the
 conquered has become the con-
 queror & the Radicalism of one
 age has become the conserva-
 tionism of the next. It is thus
 that the world has moved - it is
 thus that it seems destined to
 move. Men take their stand
 upon a great truth - & stand

there so long that what was true at the first becomes falsehood. what was necessary becomes useless. what was vital becomes a mere dead form.

Then, the world which has been going array from the old stand point, voices itself in some hero. The Radical appears with his battle cry. Here is put to death, disabled but the spirit of his words lives & suddenly the world finds itself lifted to his plane. & maintaining his principles. Then, after a generation or two of earnest living another conservative stagnation takes place. & another Radical appears to meet the same doom. but again - by the force of his life & words the world receives a new impetus & the dawn of truth becomes still brighter.

It is thus that every great truth has been born. It's birth throes have been in agony -

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it is with has occurred it is death -
but, from the days of Noah to John
the Baptist - from the days of
Athanasius to John Brown. the
truth has been born. & has surely
proven itself the death of error.

"And these monuments of anxious numbers
show each generation learned
One new word of that grand Credo
Which in prophet hearts hath burned
Since the first man stood God-conquered
With his face to Heaven upturned".

And so, by successive steps, has
mankind been lifted from dark-
ness to light. Each dawning
comes followed by a new night.
but night is never again so
dark after each dawning - men's
hearts are never again so
faint. the number of the true
& earnest is always greater
& so the lesson of Radicalism -
the lesson of that spirit which
hopes for the good & peace now

the soil - which "forgets the things
~~the things~~ that are behind" - reach-
 ing on to the ever brightening fu-
 ture - the banner of the christ
spirit. is slowly, but surely
 working in the world. & the
seers are looking forward
 with hope filled eyes to that
 dawn which shall know no
 darkness. ~~that~~ when "the earth
 shall be filled with the knowl-
 edge of the Lord".

"Careless seems the great Avenger;
 History's pages but record
 One death-grapple in the darkness
 'Tis old systems & the wood;
 Truth forever on the scaffold,
 Wrong forever on the throne, -
 Yet that scaffold sways the future,
 And behind the dim unknown,
 Standeth God within the shadows,
 Keeping watch above his own."