

# THINGS "ULTIMATE" AND THINGS IMMEDIATE

In its issue of March 16, the New York World printed an editorial entitled "Ultimate Ownership." For the benefit of Commoner readers who do not read the World, this editorial is printed in full. It follows:

"Mr. Bryan finds as much virtue in 'ultimate' as Touchstone found in 'if.' He assures the reporters that he has not changed his views on the railroad question since his Madison Square Garden speech, in which he said he had reached the conclusion that the ultimate solution would be found in government ownership. Any misunderstanding of Mr. Bryan's position was due to the fact that 'unfriendly papers lost sight of the word 'ultimate' and discussed it as an immediate question."

"But why so much insistence on 'ultimate'? If existing conditions are intolerable and there is no remedy under constitutional government as it has been administered in this country for 118 years, why procrastinate? Why talk about 'ultimate' solutions when we can have an immediate solution? Surely the present generation, sinful though it may be, has certain rights in the way of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and there is little sense in saving all the good things for posterity. Posterity may not be worthy of them."

"To quibble about 'ultimate' is beneath the dignity of a conservative, constructive statesman like Mr. Bryan. If the government must buy the property of its Harrimans, its Hills and its Morgans whenever these gentlemen do not behave, the sooner the policy is inaugurated the better. The longer it is deferred the more mischief will be done and the worse off we shall be. If there is no longer any virtue in organized government to set up standards of financial conduct and punish those who transgress, the longer we continue on the present tack the further we shall sail out of the course. Human nature is not going to change in five years or ten years or fifty years. Society will always have Harrimans, Hills and Morgans."

"If Mr. Bryan believes in government ownership at all he should demand immediate government ownership. But does he really believe in government ownership, now that he has found it unpopular? Perhaps he does, but we have observed that all the stand-patters talk about an 'ultimate' revision of the tariff, and that in their case Mr. Bryan says it means they are not in favor of revision at all. Possibly the rule does not work both ways. And possibly too Mr. Bryan has discovered that by being 'ultimately' in favor of something or other a candidate can hedge either way."

## WHAT ABOUT THE G. O. P.?

The Wall Street Journal pays to George W. Perkins a fine compliment because of his \$54,000 contribution to the conscience fund. The Journal says: "But the significance of this act, commendable as it is, is not simply personal. It marks a decided advance in political morality and corporate fidelity. It is also one of those acts that shows how effective in the long run the public conscience is as a standard of authority for the members of the community."

Will Mr. Roosevelt and Secretary of the Treasury Cortleyou recognize the "standard of authority?" Will they insist that the republican party management show that their conception of honesty is at least as high as that of George W. Perkins?

## GENERAL LEE'S EXAMPLE

Grover Cleveland has written to the Tennessee legislature what is called "a warning against radical insurance legislation." Mr. Cleveland's advice on this subject would have more weight from the disinterested standpoint were it not for the fact that he is an employe of the great insurance companies from whose exactions the authorities of Tennessee and those of other states are trying to protect the people. And this recalls the interesting and instructive letter written in 1868 by General Robert E. Lee, at a time when General Lee needed money badly. He was offered a position at the head of an insurance company. His reply to the offer was what Thomas E. Watson well calls "a sermon on standards of taste and public service," and was as follows:

"Lexington, Va., December 23, 1868.—Dear Mr. B—: I am very much obliged to you for your letter of the 12th and the kind interest you have shown in my welfare. I approve highly of your

## "ULTIMATE OWNERSHIP"

It will be observed that the New York World takes offense at the word "ultimate" and insists that "If Mr. Bryan believes in government ownership at all he should demand immediate government ownership." "To quibble about 'ultimate' is beneath the dignity of a conservative, constructive statesman like Mr. Bryan," it says, and asks: "Why talk about ultimate solutions when we can have an immediate solution?"

The World is not speaking with its usual intelligence when it insists that we must have every good thing at once or not at all. In 1896 it favored tariff reform and an income tax, and yet it was willing to postpone these things and urge the election of a high protectionist, and an opponent of the income tax because there was an immediate question upon which it agreed with the republican party. It did not insist upon immediate tariff reform, and yet the World might have asked itself: "If the World believes in tariff reform at all why should it not demand immediate tariff reform?" It is neither kind nor just in the World to ask: "But does he really believe in government ownership, now that he has found it unpopular?" It has reason enough to know that Mr. Bryan's views upon a question do not depend upon the popularity of those views. He advocated tariff reform when it was not as popular as it is now; he advocated an income tax in 1890, four years before the democrats embodied the idea in a revenue measure; he advocated the election of United States senators by direct vote of the people two years before congress ever acted favorably on the proposition; he opposed imperialism as early as June, 1898, before it was possible to ascertain the sentiment of the people, and he spoke in favor of bimetalism when the democratic administration, not to speak of the World, opposed it. Mr. Bryan even questioned the wisdom of nominating Judge Parker when the World and the Eagle were fighting over the front seat on the Parker band wagon. The difference between the "immediate" and the "ultimate" in politics is so clear that even the editor of the World could see it if he would. Jefferson believed in emancipation as an ultimate solution of the slavery question but he did not insist upon

views, and especially of your course, and feel satisfied that you will accomplish great good. I have considered Mr. F—'s proposition, and though I believe that the southern business in the present condition of our affairs, it seems to me, would be attended with great trouble, and should be managed with great care. In my present position I fear I should not have time, even if I possessed the ability, to conduct it. Life insurance trusts I consider sacred. To hazard the property of the dead, and to lose the scanty earnings of fathers and husbands who have toiled and saved that they may leave something to their families, deprived of their care and the support of their labor, is to my mind the worst of crimes. I could not undertake such a charge unless I could see and feel that I could faithfully execute it. I have therefore felt constrained, after deliberation, to decline the proposition of Mr. F—. I trust that the company may select some better man for the position, for I think in proper hands it would accomplish good. For your interest in my behalf, and for Mr. L—'s kind consideration, I am very grateful. And with my thanks to both of you, and to Mr. F— for his kindness, to whom I trust you to explain the reason of my course, I am, truly yours,  
R. E. LEE."

## THE PANAMA MYSTERY

Evidences are multiplying to show that William J. Oliver is a great contracting engineer. He made the low bid for the contract of building the Panama canal, but for some reason or other, no one knows just what, his bid was thrown out after having been virtually accepted. There have been some queer things in connection with that Panama canal job; and the Oliver circumstance was not the least strange. When his low bid was

immediate emancipation. Lincoln also opposed slavery as a system but he expressly denied that he favored immediate emancipation. It is the part of wisdom to look ahead but it is not the part of wisdom to insist upon the doing of anything before the people are ready for it. Mr. Bryan said on August 30 last that he regarded government ownership as the "ultimate" solution of the railroad question, but he was careful to say that he did not know that the country was ready for it or that a majority of the democrats favored it. Mr. Bryan has no desire to force government ownership upon the country, and he would be powerless to force government ownership upon the country against the will of the people, even if he desired to do so. According to the World's logic no one should see the wisdom of any reform until a majority of the people see it, or if he does see it he should not mention it.

The railroad managers are constantly increasing the number of advocates of government ownership by their exploitation of the public and by their opposition to regulation, but while this educational work is going on there are several reforms upon which the people are already prepared to act, and the World will not be permitted to turn attention away from these immediate questions by its frantic efforts to confuse the public mind. We will point out tendencies as we see them, Mr. Editor, but we will settle questions as we reach them. It is not necessary to shut one's eyes to the future in order to deal with the present. Neither is it necessary to abandon one's views of things ultimate in order to act upon things immediate.

Says the Milwaukee Sentinel: "The Commoner thinks the New York Press 'talks like an old-fashioned populist organ.' Well?" Of course it is well. It shows that ever now and then a republican organ sees the error of its political ways. We even have hopes for the esteemed Sentinel.

The Chicago Tribune says: "You must have noticed that municipal ownership is most popular in cities where it has not been tried." That is just about as true as most of the political arguments advanced by the Chicago Tribune, and observant people have noticed nothing of the kind indicated by the Tribune.

finally shelved Mr. Oliver made an outcry, as was natural and excusable. But since then something has happened.

And the thing that happened is significant. A newspaper dispatch says that Mr. Oliver has been made president of a big trust company at a fine salary. And that sort of a job is considerably better and easier than jabbing a spade into the stiff and germ ridden mud and sunbaked clay of the isthmus. Wallace made a good start, and then received a call to come home and take something better. Stevens took up the work with a vim, and he, too, was called home to take something easier and better. Then Shonts followed. Then came Oliver, a responsible contractor, who put in the low bid for the job under the new order of things. Just as he was about to start for the isthmus he was notified that all plans had been changed and the army engineers decided upon as bosses of the work. At about the same time comes the report that Mr. Oliver is to be made president of a big trust company.

There are some very mysterious doings connected with that Panama canal job.

## SAVING HIS FACE

"Mr. Harriman," says the Cleveland Plain Dealer, "left the White house with a smile on his face." Surely our esteemed contemporary did not expect him to leave with a patch of court plaster on it?—Washington Post.

A smile on "his face?" Isn't that the place for a smile? Besides, he couldn't have deposited that smile in the White house when he left. Mr. Roosevelt has no use for it.—New York Herald.

Perhaps, as the Chinese say, he was trying to "save his face."