
Coming Events

by Eugene V. Debs

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The dogma, "history repeats itself," is of universal acceptance. Is it true? The answer is, yes, and no — each correct from different points of view. We omit all records of physical phenomena. In such matters history daily repeats itself. The tides ebb and flow, comets come and go, as do the seasons. Earthquakes and cyclones, as of old, leave their reservations and go on the war path to perpetrate their devastations. In recording such things history repeats itself. But in regard to matters relating to men and nations, as in by-gone centuries, history does not repeat itself, and will never again repeat itself — that is to say, in all cases there will be such modifications as to destroy the parallels. Anything approximating a careful analysis of the subject must lead to the conclusion that coming events, in human affairs, are to be totally unlike the events, which history has recorded of the past in that line.

We are not unmindful that in writing of the future the idea suggests infinity and therefore reaches beyond all mental grasp, and that no man knoweth what the future has in store for the world. Nevertheless we know what history has recorded, and we know what is now transpiring, and however exhaustive the search we find no instance in which history is repeating itself. Events as they occur are unlike former events, and it may be observed that when approximations are noticed there are such modifications as to create wide dissimilarity.

No one supposes that history will repeat itself in recording such events as relate to the Jews, to the rise and fall of the Assyrian, Persian, Egyptian, and Roman empires, and to others that could be named. Conditions have changed to an extent that makes the repetition of such records impossible. We are aware of the claim that human nature is "the same yesterday, today, and forever." In so far as the attributes of human nature are concerned, the statement is doubtless true, and we would not change them if we could. We would not have

man a machine — an automaton — but it is nevertheless true that human nature is susceptible of vast improvement, ranging upward from the degeneracy of the Hottentot to the full-orbed intellect of a Sir Isaac Newton, and it is this fact of mind development that is changing the character of events, and therefore, as a matter of course, making it impossible for history to repeat itself. Hence, however schooled men may be in “mystical lore,” and however capable of interpreting the “shadows of coming events,” the event itself will, if it comes, be unlike events of the past.

We do not doubt that the law of cause and effect is irrevocable, nor do we doubt that the law exists in human affairs as certainly as in nature. Idleness is the prolific parent of vice; ignorance breeds superstition, etc., to the end of the chapter; but in the steady advancement of human nature antagonistic forces have been put in operation which modify effects, change results, and hence history chronicles events essentially different from those which occurred in the past, when such antagonistic forces were not in operation.

Take for instance the dogma of a “divine right to rule,” unchallenged for centuries. We now behold an opposing force in the field — call it Truth, if you please. It is quite as much an attribute of human nature as error, and is everywhere wrecking error. It bombards thrones, autocracy, plutocracy, and aristocracy, and champions democracy, or the rights of the people. It is the eternal foe of ignorance and the hope of the world. It brings into flaming prominence the poetic prophecy of Bryant:

Truth, crush'd to earth, shall rise again;
The eternal years of God are hers;
But Error, wounded, writhes in pain,
And dies among his worshippers.¹

This development of all the attributes of human nature is to change coming events. Nothing is more certain in human affairs, and within the entire realm of investigation there is nothing more cheering to the world of labor.

We do not doubt that the era has dawned when the capitalistic class will put forth its mightiest efforts to change the trend of labor affairs; all the signs point in that direction. But labor, observant of forces and factors, proposes that history shall record events quite dif-

¹ Stanza from “The Battle-field” (1841), by **William Cullen Bryant** (1794-1878).

ferent from those which have occurred in the past, when autocrats marshaled their hosts for the fray and labor paid all the penalties of defeat.

It is a campaign of education, pure and simple, and the supreme question is, what shall be the character of coming events? Labor can, if it will, require history to chronicle events such as the world has not known since “the morning stars sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy.”²

Edited with footnotes by Tim Davenport

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² Allusion to *Job*, chapter 38, verse 7.