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The Anxieties of Iron

Ricardo Flores Magón

1915

The iron shuddered in the bosom of the mountain feeling footsteps on the peak.

“It is man treading about in search of me,” it said. And its molecules vibrated intensely in a mixed sensation of anguish and pleasure.

The footsteps resonated energetically, as if they were those of a fearless man who confronts nature to reclaim from it what human beings need.

“For what will they want me?” the worthy metal asked itself anxiously. And the entire mountain, whose skeleton it constitutes, quaked. “I shake just thinking that I might be converted into a tool of injustice: I who, because of my own naturalness, should only be the fuel of progress and liberty” it added.

There was a pause, during which one could hear, with all clarity, the sound of a pick striking the back of the mountain.

“Yes, it is a man looking for me to make of me, perhaps, shackles for dragging people. The man who is striving to find me will convert me into bars for jail cells or bolts for prison doors.” And its molecules vibrated with indignation and wrath.

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The pounding continued and the echo repeated the sounds, which resembled the moans of a giant being pummeled in the back.

“Maybe the man looking for me will make me into the shrapnel that a tyrant will use to suffocate protest in the gullet. Maybe I will become a guillotine that will behead someone when he steps outside of the straight path of a Law written by its executioners ...”

The pick gashed, gashed, and gashed. The mountain groaned like an impotent monster under the fists of a titan.

“Ah, I suffer so much! Oh, what cruel suspense! I do not want to be shackles or bolts or bars. I want to be shrapnel, but in the hands of the people, to whisk away the tyrants. I want to be a guillotine, but in the hands of the rebel, to pluck off the head of the oppressor. What am I going to be? I could be a spur, but also I might see myself converted into a bridle. I impel and I restrain, depending on what use they want to give me; I give life and I give death; I am a plough and I am a sword... As a sharp blade, I enslave in the hands of military officers, I liberate in the hands of the people. Ah, I am used for good and for evil! As the trigger of a gun, I can be made to shoot the accursed projectile that tears Ferrer from life, or the blessed bullet that liberates the world from the tyranny of Canalejas. In the hands of Maura, I am the slave of hell; in the hands of Pardiñas, I serve justice. My same brilliance is life and death: I shine with promises of life in the revolver of Angiolillo. I shine with the lividly of death in the policeman’s badge. What am I going to be? What am I going to be?”

The pick gashed, gashed, gashed, making the mountain shake in the midst of nature, indifferent to the agonies of the iron.