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EDITORIAL

LIBELING HUMAN NATURE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

The Contest of Virtue that, as a spasm seems to have seized both camps of crime-breeders in this city—the Goo Goo camp and the Tammany camp,—resolves itself into an atrocious libel on human nature. Both Bishop Potter, when addressing his coterie, and Richard Croker, when addressing his braves, not to say anything of Dr. David Blaustein, addressing the Industrial Commission, make it a point that immorality has taken refuge in the tenement houses, and that “the police are responsible.”

Wondrous, if these gentlemen are sincere, must be their conception of man and his doings. According to them there are depraved beings in humanity just as there are wolves in the woods; and, just as wolves, driven from one place will take refuge in another, so do the depraved characters wander about.

Vice is not a species, like wolves. Vice is a growth. Wolves may be suppressed by killing the individuals of the species; vice is not suppressable by any repressive measure applied to the individual outbreak of vice. Vice can no more be done away with by such methods than the Mississippi could be drained dry by bottling up every bottleful of water that it pours into the Gulf stream. As the Mississippi would continually recruit its forces from its myriad sources, so would vice recruit its energies from the deep and fruitful source that it gives birth to.

Man, said the Eastern sage, is like water in this, that water will naturally run down, but, by artificial means, may be forced, contrary to the laws of its nature, to spout upward; so man naturally tends upward toward purer life, but, by artificial means, may be forced contrary to the laws of his nature, to sink down to impurity.

The vice that “takes refuge in tenement houses” does not exist because of the vicious nature of those who are sunk in it; it exists because of the social system which forces humanity downward.

In a social system where the capacity to earn a living becomes ever harder; where, as a consequence of that, the home is broken and the sexes are either barred

from a common hearth or torn away from it;—in such a social system the instinct of self-preservation, the identical instinct that turns men and women into cannibals at shipwrecks, coupled with the physical needs of the race, will cause vice to shoot up irresistibly.

Blame the police! As well blame an unhorsed man for not holding his horse back by the tail!

Not all the spies whom this vice-breeding social system of Capital may set loose will stand. The spies themselves are human. Turn the police into inquisitors; furnish them with search-warrants to enable them to penetrate at what time they may want into what tenement or other domicile they may please, and yet vice will flourish on.

Vice is ineradicable so long as a living is precarious. Time was when the whole productive powers of the race did not suffice to secure the living of man. In those days the philanthropist stood powerless before the problem that saddened his heart. To-day, however, with productive powers so immeasurable as to secure the living of all, the man of heart, provided he be a man of intellect also, stands no longer powerless. When, accordingly, we see in this year of grace, 1900, the Potters, the Crokers and the Blausteins acting as helplessly before the problem of vice as people acted generations ago, the conclusion is justified that their motives are corrupt, their philanthropy a word to traffic on.

And so it is!

The beneficiaries of vice will ever be found the supporters of vice. The best way to support vice to-day is to pretend to be up in arms against it,—as do these upholders of the Capitalist Social System.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.

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