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EDITORIAL

THE LATEST HOBSON'S CHOICE.

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THERE is a great duel going on on the subject of city passenger traffic; and it is conducted with such positive savageness by the duelists that the working class is apt to be taken in, "taken in" in the sense of "taking sides," and thereby wasting the energies at their command, which, if properly organized and directed, would result in sending both sets of duelists in political ambulances to political hospitals, whence to be transported to their well-earned political graves. Indeed, much of the fury of the duel is intended to bring on just this switching off of latent popular energies, and in that way put off such a "catastrophe to civilization," as the dueling sets consider the doing away with their system of plunder would be.

Who, in New York, and of course in all other large cities, does not feel exasperated at the way the street railway companies treat the public? They act towards the public with the brutality of conquerors in a conquered town. The extension that cities have taken compels extensive traveling. The ostensible theory on which the street railways are chartered is to accommodate the public: the actual theory that they go by is to pluck the public. They run as few cars as possible: this reduces running expenses. But the public must travel: few or many cars, the same volume of traffic is handled. Accordingly, the companies have the benefit of the large and increasing traffic at a minimum of expense. The effect on the "traffic" is that it is handled like cattle: the seats provided are uncomfortably narrow, and, owing to the fewness of cars, even such narrow seats are too few. The bulk of the traffic is packed up standing. It is in a hurry; it can't choose but be in a hurry; to wait is fruitless; to walk is out of the question; so the public grins and bears it, and the companies rake in the dividends. It is over this that a set of cormorants who profit by a system that breeds such imposition, divide, into the two sets that are doing the dueling.

One set—well typified by the professional politician, which means the cormorant on cormorants—introduced a bill in Albany which provides that street railway companies shall not demand or collect fare of a passenger unless a seat is provided for him, and the seat is to be of enlarged width. The other set—well typified by its spokesman, the metropolitan organ of the Schiff banking interests—, bridles up, and declares that the only purpose of such bills is “to compel soulless corporations to make terms with the sponsor or sponsors of the measure for its abandonment.” These two first passes will give a sufficient idea of the nature of the other passes, the thrusts and counter thrusts of the duelists.

Whatever the politician's actual purpose may be in proposing such a bill, certain it is that he puts his finger on a positive sore and thereby ingratiates himself with the public; on the other hand, whatever the company's delinquencies are, certain it is that its counter thrusts reveal the character of the political agencies that the capitalist class has to deal with, so long as it does not send its own members into office, and the company thereby enlists the sympathy of the public against political corruption. And thus the public is expected to divide: one set against the “grasping corporation,” another set against the “corrupt politician,” and—and whichever wins the working class loses.

Such is the Hobson's Choice that the plundering class ever has to offer to the plundered. The working class has nothing to gain from either. By siding with either it carries away only the blows, never the fruits of the fray. There are no trophies for Labor except in that fray in which the issue shall be, Shall the cormorant class of Capitalists, together with the cormorants upon them, the professional politicians, go? Out of that fray the trophies for Labor will be as certain as they will be brilliant.

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

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