

EDITORIAL

BRYAN JUST SHORT OF ARTEMUS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

FULLY five times in the course of his acceptance speech, pronounced yesterday, does Mr. Bryan ask the question: Shall the people rule?

There is no law imaginable that will enable propertiless people to rule. Rule is an attribute of property. He who holds property rules; he who holds none is ruled. For the people to rule in fact they must be property-holders. Only then is rule other than tyranny. The question, Shall the people rule? implies they do not rule to-day. The fact of their not ruling reflects the fact of their being propertiless, through no fault of theirs. The affirmative answer to the question, Shall the people rule? obviously requires propositions that shall enable the people to acquire the property necessary for rule, and requisite to prevent being tyrannized.

Not once is Mr. Bryan's question followed by the only answer the question demands.

Conspicuous by its absence is all proposition that shall disable the holder of capital—the product of “larceny by law”—from plundering the workers of the full four-fifths they are plundered of to-day, and thereby barred from rule.

Conspicuous by its absence is all proposition that shall guarantee to the workers the opportunity to work, and shall insure them against enforced idleness, seasoned with starvation for themselves and their families, whenever the holder of capital sees no opportunity to knock profits out of the toil of the workers.

Conspicuous by its absence is all proposition that shall even remotely reform the capitalist canon that holds wealth, though the product of Labor, to be the reward of idleness.

The question, Shall the people rule?—a question that bobs up repeatedly in Mr. Bryan's speech—is left each time unanswered. Soon as asked the answer is dropped, and the Orator of the Platte flies off warbling some unresponsive tune.

Thus did Artemus Ward in one of his lectures keep his audience roaring. The subject of the lecture—"Africa"—was never touched upon. Again and again the lecturer stopped to say: "I am to speak about Africa," and then forthwith proceeded to tell some joke that had no more to do with Africa than sun-spots have to do with panics. The jokes thus retailed gathered zest through their irrelevancy, until the last roar of laughter greeted the lecturer's closing words: "Well, ladies and gentlemen, as to Africa, you can find out all about it on the map—I'm no map."

Mr. Bryan's speech closed abruptly. He had followed Artemus Ward as a model up to just before the close. His closing sentence should have been: "Gentlemen of the Notification Committee, as to, Shall the people rule? you can find all about it in the platform and literature of the Socialist Labor Party—I'm no Socialist."

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

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