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EDITORIAL

“IDEAS” AND “IDEALS.”

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THE New York Mayor McClellan delivered in Ithaca an address that must have made the students of the classes of philology and logic feel the way Artemus Ward says his stomach felt after partaking of hash at Oberlin College—potato peelings of reasoning and fishbones of language must have been sticking out all over them. The Mayor declared that “the crying need of the day is fewer men with ideas and more men with ideals.”

“The word idea,” says Locke, “serves best to stand for whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks.”

The word, “ideal,” says the Standard Dictionary, is “that which is conceived or taken as a standard of excellence, or ultimate object of attainment.”

The boundary line between the “Idea” and the “Ideal” is hard to draw—as hard as, or harder than, it would be to draw the boundary line between hen and chicks; between apple and trunk; between foundation and architrave of a building; between political corruption and McClellan, etc., etc. There is, to be sure, a difference between the hen and her chicks, the apple and its trunk, base and architrave, political corruption and McClellan. But the hard and fast boundary line of separation between them, implied in McClellan’s sentence that “the crying need of the day is fewer men of ideas and more men of ideals,” is just so much logical nonsense, and linguistic twaddle. The McClellan distinction between the “Idea” and the “Ideal” implies, if not downright hostility between the two, at least the notion that the latter can exist without the former—chicks without hens to lay the eggs; apples without trunks to draw the sap from the earth, and breathe in air and moisture through their lungs, the leaves, to shape into buds and ripen into fruit; architraves floating in the air without bases on which to support themselves; or, finally, McClellans without that political corruption that dictates candidates and

dictates election returns.

Without the hen there can be no chicks; without the trunk there can be no apple; without the base, no architrave in position; without political corruption no McClellan;—and without “Ideas,” no “Ideals.”

When Mayor McClellan declared for “Ideals” and against “Ideas” he stood a living illustration of the absurdity of his utterance. The flower of the nonsense that blossomed on the lips of McClellan is his “Ideal.” How could that flower blossom if it did not have a McClellan for its peduncle, a Tammany for its stalk, and political corruption for its soil or “Idea”?

No wonder the Mayor declared the “Idea” Socialism a pestilence. The “Idea” Cat is pestilential to the “Idea” Mouse; the “Idea” Toxine is pestilential to the “Idea” Microbe; the “Idea” Integrity is pestilential to the “Idea” Robbery. Of course, the trunk of the “Idea” Socialism brings forth the flower of the “Ideal”—Down with Capitalism! or, Up with the Socialist Republic! Of course, also, if the trunk of the “Idea” Socialism were to be cut down and thrown into the fire, the flower of the “Ideal” would perish. But let the McClellans look out how they apply the axe. If it is indiscriminately applied at all trunks (“Ideas”), then all flowers (“Ideals”) would perish also—the flower of the McClellan “Ideal” along with the rest. Would the “Ideal” McClellan like to be laid in the same and simultaneous grave with the “Ideal” Socialist Republic? It surely would not fancy such desecration.

When the Cornell students who listened to McClellan shall have recovered from the mental indigestion into which the Tammany Mayor threw them, they will continue to cultivate “Ideas”—each according to his mental powers. Some will cultivate the political corruption “Idea,” and they will bring forth McClellan “Ideals”; others will cultivate the Socialist “Idea,” and they will bring forth the Socialist Republic “Ideal.”

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

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