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EDITORIAL

WORK FOR OUT-OF-WORK PARSONS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

A FEW Sundays ago Bishop Potter delivered a sermon in New York on “Unemployed Clergymen.” The sermon was evidence that the cry “Out of Work” had invaded the alleged sanctum of the pulpiter. The matter was pronounced a “burning question.” It revealed all the features raised by the identical cry, uttered by the less pretentious, but infinitely more useful wage slave, without whose toil the pulpiter would have no shoes and no clothes to stand in, no food and no shelter to enable him to ply his trade of “thumping on the pulpit, drum ecclesiastic;” aye, he would even lack that ecclesiastic “tool of production” to roll his rataplan on.

The Bishop’s sermon may be considered the theoretic utterance of a condition; the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, now in session at San Francisco, has undertaken to handle the condition practically. Practically? Well, as practically as the ten blind men in the story who tried to describe an elephant by the different parts of which each happened to have his hands on. The gentlemen of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church, similarly, blindly groping around the Social Question, are considering a plan to furnish work, or keep at work the unemployed clergy.

It occurred to the Convention that the teachings of the canon, in recognizing a divorce, virtually takes from the clergymen a certain industry which the Prayer Book throws in their way. By declaring that “Whom God hath joined together man may not put asunder,” the Prayer Book placed itself as distinctly as possible on record as countenancing no marriage not celebrated by a parson. A marriage celebrated by an Alderman, a Justice of the Peace, or a Conveyancer, was not an “act of God:” to make it an “act of God,” the joining of man and wife had to be done by a parson. The Prayer Book, accordingly, discriminates in favor of the parson and against the Alderman, etc., throwing the trade in the way of the former. On the other hand, the canon, by recognizing divorce left a “free field and no favor.” The

work of the parson could thus be undone by the non-parson. The reports from the Convention show that the evil is to {be} checked. In the language of the despatches, “the change likely to be made will be in the direction of bringing the canon into conformity with the Prayer Book.” This can mean nothing else than that divorce is henceforth to be sanctioned only when the job is done by a parson, in other words, the fees, now going to lay performers, are to be raked in by the pulpiter.

Will the scheme accomplish the desired result? Hardly. Faster than couples care to be joined together, and much faster than they may wish to be put asunder, the seminaries will pour the floods of fledglings into the ministerial market. The avenues for starts in life are being barred with ever higher barriers to the man without capital; the path of him who submits to be a wage slave is becoming ever more crowded with applicants, and existence is becoming more arduous and degrading; the clerical avocations are overstocked;—a veritable flood, the labor-powers of the nation are rising above the banks of the stream and inundating the land far and wide. The profession of pulpitering does not, nor could it escape the fate of other pursuits. Nor is the pulpiter assailed from that side only. While the supply of his services is rising ever higher, the demand declines, at least relatively. The very social system that pulpiterdom upholds tends to keep the sexes apart. It is not the least of the evils of capitalism that it tears the family apart. Accordingly, the perverse social system that the pulpiter sings the praises of, reacts upon the pulpiter himself. If marriage fees decrease, how could divorce fees increase?

The scheme of the Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church will not work. While these gentlemen are groping along to secure fees to idlers, the Socialist Labor Party is marching with steady tread to secure freedom and life to the workers.

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