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EDITORIAL

BELATED CATOS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

“OUR ideals of the home have gone down. We talk of Mormonism, and affect a horror of it, as an unclean and loathesome thing; but as between a system that allows a man to have three or four ex-wives, or a woman to have three to four ex-husbands, and a system that permits a man to have his plural wives all at once, there is very little to choose. I am not sure but the odds are on the side of the Mormon.

“If this social scourge of easy divorce continues, it will call down upon us {as} a people the curse of the Almighty God. Wives are taking the place of mothers. Childless firesides are being substituted for family circles. The flat and the apartment house and the club, together with certain social and prudential considerations, are robbing our married women of material {maternal?} instincts and ambitions. It is the ring of the telephone and not the cry of the baby that we hear nowadays. One of the greatest needs of our modern life is mothers. A restoration of ethical ideals is imperatively needed.”

Who is it that said this? If it were not for the occurrence of the words “Mormonism” and “telephone,” terms unknown in the days of the old Romans, the utterance might be imputed to the austere old Cato the Censor, and then the passage would be cited as an illustration of how needful the experience and knowledge of older civilizations are even to the brightest intellects in order to have them understand their own days. The wails of Cato the Censor at the childlessness of the homes and at the absence of the maternal instinct, his erroneous belief that these were causes in themselves instead of being effect, and his blunder at imagining that by altering the effect he could restore the commonwealth to its pristine purity—those wails, those errors, those blunders were pardonable in him. They are, however, not pardonable in the Rev. Robert F. Coyle who uttered them in the course of his address to the 116th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States that convened in Buffalo on the 18th of this month. He should know better than to stand in this year of grace 1904—about 2,000 years after Cato

and with the vistas of the crumbled civilizations of Greece and Rome to guide his mind—no further than Cato stood.

The Catos and the Coyles are blind Cassandras, or to put it in language less choice but much terser, they try to hold a run-away horse back by the tail. Nor is the absurdity of their position relieved by the elegance of their language, or the pictorial pithiness of their summaries, such as “the ring of the telephone and not the cry of the baby” is what is heard nowadays in the homes of the ruling class.

Not wails will stead at this pass, but a close observation of the situation, and if this is done by the light of former civilizations the facts will transpire that the public patrimony having been pilfered and plundered from the workers by the idle rulers, the immorality of the act avenges itself upon the latter, their homes become childless and themselves putrid, while the stock of the working masses, though despoiled, preserves its numbers, and with that the possibility of redeeming society. The facts thus revealed by close observation turn the faces of the thinking away from the rotten and rotting ruling class to the sound working and ruled class. Once turned in that direction the method by which to work out of the social system the impurity that has crept into it, and to prevent its recurrence becomes obvious:

The public ownership of the land on and the tools with which to work, so that he who works shall live, and he who does not may starve to his heart’s content. The home, that idyl of man, is based and depends upon sound, material foundations. The foundation of plunder kills the home—and its music, the baby’s cry and prattle.

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

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