

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 8, NO. 229.

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 1908.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

AN OPEN LETTER TO V.M. HENDRICKSON.

By DANIEL DE LEON

V.M. HENDRICKSON,

Brooklyn, N.Y.

DEAR Sir:—

This office is in receipt of your invitation to join “Ye Village Improvement Society” in the “crusade” which it has inaugurated against the “disfiguring poles from which radiate a maze of lines on which are always to be seen, high in air, sections of the family wash,” and in favor of “more attractive back yards,” the present ones being an “eyesore” in that they give “a neighborhood a cheap tenement house outlook and lessen property values.”

To be candid, in the absence of positive denial on your part, we are constrained to consider your letter a hoax—a sort of imitation of, and improvement upon, Dickens’s satire on the manifold societies which he quotes in *Pickwick Papers*, started partly by freaks, partly by people with an eye to “turning an honest copper,” and one of which, typical of the others, was the Society for furnishing the heathens with handkerchiefs bearing holy mottoes to blow their noses in.

Like all real humorists, Dickens was a satirist of existing Wrong, and especially of the hypocrisy which indulges in what another satirist, Mark Twain, calls the silent-acting of a lie—the striking of an attitude that condones Wrong while seeming to be up in arms against it by attacking its consequences. The idea of seeking to “improve” the heathen abroad, when heathendom of the crassest nature is allowed to flourish at home, was not an idea that could commend itself to the rectitude of a Dickens. When that revolting idea furthermore decked itself in the money-making scheme of producing pious handkerchiefs, Dickens let fly his shafts of ridicule. Just such a target does “Ye Village Improvement Society” present with

its anti-clothes lines “crusade” to beautify back yards in the interest of “property holders.”

He who leaves the tenement house plague untouched; he who has no eyes for the disfiguring of humanity that is going on in the mold of these rookeries that are crippling the minds, morals and bodies of the masses of our people; he who, consequently has no thought for the social conditions that produce such plague spots; he who, in sight of these Wrongs, that cry to Heaven, bestows thought, time, energy and some cash investment in the endeavor to beautify backyards by a “crusade” against “pulley line poles”;—what else is such a person doing but investing in pious handkerchiefs and agitating for their purchase and shipment to distant heathens with a cold in their heads?—what else is such a person doing but “fiddling while Rome burns”?

If “Ye Village Improvement Society” is a good joke—we have no use for it: the work in hand is too serious. If “Ye Village Improvement Society” is a property holders’ scheme to raise their “property values”—we have still less use for it: the work in hand demands the improvement of the WORKING CLASS, not of the PURSES of the property holding class, whose already bursting purses are reducing the Working Class to the conditions of helots.

—EDITOR THE PEOPLE.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded December 2009

slpns@slp.org