ONE CENT.

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 9, NO. 273.

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, MARCH 30, 1909.

EDITORIAL

FATHER MORGAN M. SHEEDY ON SOCIALISM.

By DANIEL DE LEON

HE story is told of Mark Twain that one day he appeared before James Redpath, who ran a lecture bureau, and informed his friend James he wanted to be booked for a lecture tour. Delighted thereat—a lecture tour by Mark Twain was always profitable—Redpath said: "Good! What shall it be upon, Mark?" and he got ready to write down the title of the lecture. Mark Twain answered: "Astronomy." Redpath's hand stood stock still. Astonished he inquired: "Astronomy? What do you know about astronomy?" "That's just it," was Mark Twain's unperturbed explanation; "I know nothing about astronomy—the very reason why I should be able to deliver an elegant lecture thereon. My imagination will have free scope, unhampered by any facts, unfettered by any reason."

'Twas the sprit of Mark Twain that spoke in St. John's Church at Altoona, Pa., on the evening of March 21, when Father Morgan M. Sheedy delivered a lecture. The subject was not "Astronomy," it was "Socialism." The Rev. Father gave the reins to his imagination; it cavorted unhampered by facts, unfettered by reason—or, rather, the reason went abumpety-bumping against the facts.

For instance—to take one instance out of a score:

Father Sheedy said "it is a natural desire of men to own property," and he added "collectivism appeals to the man who has nothing." After stating two such pregnant facts, borrowed from Socialism, the man, whose reason facts control, can arrive only at the conclusion that Socialism is inevitable. Not so Father Sheedy. His imagination, unhampered by fact, unfettered by reason, concluded that "Socialism is absolutely impossible."

What are the facts and reason in the case?

Look at the Fiji Islander of to-day. His waist garlanded with a wreath of evergreens for only covering, he is elaborately clothed when compared with his still more savage ancestors of Adamic days—before "the fall." Compared with the Bornese—the prickly jungles in which he lives compelling skirt and hose—the Fiji is undressed. Compared with the Laplander, barely the tip of whose nose can be safely left exposed, the Bornese is naked. The reason, grounded on the facts, is that "clothes" is a relative thing. What is clothes to one, may be no clothes at all to another Conditions determine the fact. Precisely the same with property. What is property at one stage of economic development is no property at a later stage—is clothes as much as the wreath of evergreens that is "clothes" to the Fiji Islander would be "clothes" to the Laplander.

Economic development has reached the point when we hear of the "small millionaire." His property is too small to hold its own against the billionaire concern. If the "little millionaire" is clad too thinly for the billionaire temperature of modern society, two things follow:—first, the large number of those who have still less are in various degrees of economic nakedness; and second, he is bound to join the naked crew. There is a third conclusion. The crew he joins is the overwhelming majority.

Aye, indeed, Socialism "appeals to the man who has nothing." Already he is the overwhelming majority. Daily he waxes more numerous. A steadily swelling majority of economically naked humanity with whom the desire for property is an instinctive desire, being but one of the numerous manifestations of the natural instinct of self-preservation—that steadily swelling majority is the rock against which Sunday school economics and sociology are bound to dash themselves, just he same as Sunday school geology and biology have before this dashed themselves against Natural Science. It is, moreover, the Petrus rock upon which the true Evangel of human redemption will be built—"and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."¹

slpns@slp.org

Socialist Labor Party

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America. Uploaded July 2010

¹ [Matthew 16:18.]