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EDITORIAL

MEDICINE ON ONE LEG.

By DANIEL DE LEON

AT the first general public health conference in the United States, held in Baltimore on the 6th inst., the brilliant epigram-maker and medical popularizer Dr. Woods Hutchinson said:

“Treat all normal children fairly and kindly, and there will be no criminals, paupers, drunkards, tramps or aristocrats within three generations.”

Like all epigrams, Dr. Woods Hutchinson’s with the rest, this declaration is more vivacious than accurate. In fact, it is medicine on one leg.

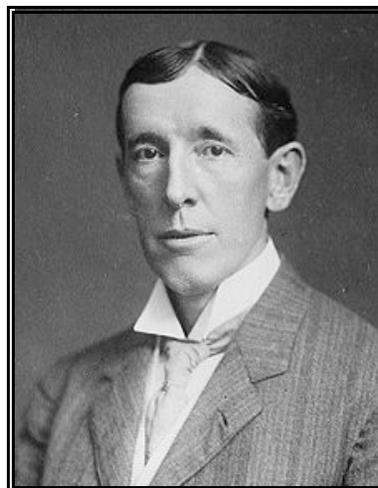
Moral delinquency, in which category aristocracy, no less than drunkenness, is correctly placed by the Doctor, is the product, in normal beings, of two factors—

One, a lack of the necessary stamina and strength of will to resist an ever-pressing temptation or environment;

And the other, the ever-pressing temptation or environment itself.

Which of these two is the main, the overwhelmingly controlling factor, it should not be hard to discern. Even the strongest will may in time break down under the constant and accumulative pressure of a hostile environment; while on the other hand, it is inconceivable that a normal person of even the weakest will should ever go wrong in the utter absence of any circumstance tending to influence him in that direction rather than the other.

Which of these two factors of moral delinquency Dr. Hutchinson’s remedy would



WOODS HUTCHINSON
(1862–1930)

remedy, should again not be difficult of discernment. He is concerned purely with the subjective problem of building up a stronger defense against hostile surroundings. And at the same time he leaves the hostile surroundings unscotched, unconsidered even, in full swing at any time to rise still higher and overtop all but the most miraculous defensive stamina that may be erected against them.

The plea for treating normal children fairly and kindly is, so far as it goes, excellent. To expect it, however, to rear a race of perfect beings in the midst of a social and industrial system that steadily makes for moral depression, is to expect figs from a thistle, or healing properties from a smallpox germ. Moreover, under capitalism, it is impossible of practise. Socialism alone will give it full play, and at the same time assist the benign principle to produce its deservedly benign results.

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