

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 6, NO. 352.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, JUNE 17, 1906.

TWO CENTS.

EDITORIAL

ST. PAUL.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE firm of Putnam & Sons has brought out a beautiful English translation by the Rev. W.D. Morrison of the German Professor H. Weinel's work *St. Paul: The Man and His Work*. Prof. Weinel's work can hardly be called "orthodox." Orthodoxy does not tolerate criticism; least of all does it tolerate the placing of theological things and persons under the scalpel of historical analysis. Nevertheless, though orthodoxy may frown, history applauds. Prof. Weinel's work is historic-biographic.

That Saul of Tarsus was a leading historical personage none will deny except, perhaps, the professional atheist. The Socialist, equipped with the materialist key to unlock the secrets of history, understands the genesis of creed. No amount of creed-mystification and no amount of crime, committed with the aid of such mystifications, will disable him from stripping a great historic figure from these rags that deform him, and viewing the colossus in all its just proportions. Prof. Weinel's work is of this nature. He presents Paul the man AND his work—or should we not rather say AT his work? He unveils him laboring in the trammels of early training; in the narrowness of the fathers; scenting, consciously or unconsciously, the break-up of tribal society; and clothing his thoughts in the best learning and literature of the day. Marx renders reverence to Aristotle where Aristotle erred. It is with great men as with useful animals. Even the disease of the cow is beneficial to man; even the errors of great men are beneficial to posterity. The inability of Aristotle to conceive of freedom, admittedly because in his days the wheel of the machine did not revolve of itself, pointed lucidly to the possibility and certainty of freedom when, as happens to-day, the wheels of the machinery of production turn without the muscular effort of man. So may it be said with regard to Paul. The conception of the material basis for sentiment could no more have found lodgment

in the head of the generation of Paul, than could the conception of the self-moving and, consequently, freedom-promoting machine find lodgment in the head of the generation of Aristotle. The merit, however, the distinction of Aristotle's genius lay in his stating the conditions for freedom. Likewise with Paul. The merit and distinguished feature of his genius lies in his stating the materialist conception of history, notwithstanding, as in the instance of Aristotle, his times suggested the opposite. Thick volumes could not more pithily point to the basis for freedom than Aristotle's dictum of its impossibility; neither could thick volumes, and whole rows of volumes, ring more clearly than did Paul's epistles preaching creed, ring the note of the vapidness of creed, and of man's readiness to adopt any creed-belief, however incompatible its purity with the impure material life that its votaries may find material conditions to tempt them into, if not to force upon them. Paul's epistles to the Corinthians, especially the First Epistle, culminating in the 13th chapter, are lyrics in the matter.

Paul perceived, as we do to-day, that it was quite possible for men to believe and believe sincerely in a creed, the morality of which rejected certain acts, and yet to practice those very acts. His First Epistle to the Corinthians, is addressed to the Saints, as the believers in the new creed were styled, and yet he charges those very Saints with "contentions" among themselves, with "fornications," with "covetousness," with "extortion," with "drunkenness," with "going to law" in matters against one another, etc., etc. Aristotle justified slavery by the impotence of the mechanical arts; Paul takes refuge in his 13th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and plants himself upon the principle that Faith and the words of Faith (creed-belief) are "like sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" where there is no Charity, i.e., actual practice.

The "Saints" of Paul's days are no more and no better than the believers of to-day. Material needs determine practical works. The "saintliest" of "Saints" are furnished with stomachs to fill, heads to shelter, backs to clothe. These physical needs are paramount with the masses, however individuals may rise above them; hence the "saintliest" of "Saints" will be found to "believe" one way and "practice" another, and, what is most significantly to the point, tacitly act up to the principle that the material conditions which dictate "practice" are paramount.

Paul's error in preaching purity without a thought to the material conditions that render purity possible, is no worse than Aristotle's error in imagining impossible the self-moving wheel. Paul's bugle sound relegating Faith to the rear, and placing Charity to the front, thereby recognizing facts and acts as the only true foundation for sentiment, and that at an age of rising ecclesiasticism, places the pupil of Gamaliel abreast of the tutor of Alexander the Great in point of genius—a genius that, though incrustated with the error of its age, projected itself far into the more enlightened age of the future.

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Uploaded March 2009

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