

EDITORIAL

FLEMING ON THE OPERATING TABLE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IN the city of Philadelphia there is a paper named *The North America*. The same city rejoices in a resident, John J. Fleming by name. The two foregathered. The former furnished the space, the latter the matter in which Christian Socialism is lashed over the back of Socialism, and Socialism over the back of Christian Socialism.

Mr. Fleming's argument is to the effect that there can be no such thing as "Christian Socialism" because Christianity teaches love and forgiveness for the weak and erring, while Socialism has for its slogan, "He that will not work shall not eat."

The ground chosen by Mr. Fleming is one that should be grist to the Christian Socialist mill; it certainly is welcome to the Socialist.

Leaving for the Christian Socialist to show Mr. Fleming how un-Christian was St. Paul when in his second epistle to the Thessalonians, chapter III., verse 10, he said: "If any men would not work, neither should he eat"—leaving that canonical point for the Christian Socialist to elaborate, we shall try to perform free, gratis and for nothing, a surgical operation upon Mr. Fleming's cranium. Effecting with hammer and chisel a slit in the gentleman's noodle, we shall proceed to pour through the aperture a few drops of sense that may improve the brain below.

To "will" is not to "can." English primers teach that if a man "will" not it is that he "can," but won't. It follows that the Socialist saying: "He that will not work shall not eat" excludes the weak who are unable to work. Seeing they "can" not work, Socialism, English grammar teaches, will allow them to eat. That much for the "weak."

Now as to the erring. The Socialist saying surely affects these. There is a class of "erring" people who "can," but "will" not work. In political economy they are

known as the capitalist class. In the criminal code they would come under the heads of “thieves,” “robbers,” “burglars,” “raisers of money under false pretences,” etc. These gentry are certainly an “erring” crew. Their idea of property is that wealth is the just reward of idleness; they also hold that idleness is the source of all wealth. It is a curious notion, comical withal, but tragic for its effect. Acting obedient to the notion, these “erring” brothers cheat the workers of the wealth they produce; if gentle methods of cheating will not do, ungentle ones are resorted to: the workers are waylaid, shanghaied, plundered and, so as to keep them respectful, are either shot down, or, if the worker “gets his drop” on his assailant, then he is locked up for “murder,” as was done to M.R. Preston.

Mr. Fleming would have “love and forgiveness” extended to these “erring” brothers. He is right, only he misquotes Socialism. Socialism does extend “love” to these “erring” brothers; it also extends “forgiveness” to them.

When members of the erring fraternity of robbers and burglars are caught, they are punished with excessive severity: they are put to hard labor, long hours, are locked up in dingy cells. Socialism being full of “love,” and still fuller of “forgiveness,” would do nothing of the sort. It will tell these “erring” or capitalist brothers: “Go to work, like any of us, who have worked all our lives. A few hours’ work will afford you ample wealth, as it will us. Work, along with us. Gather inspiration from our industry, and your past will be forgiven. You will have food and raiment and housing such as civilized man requires. If you refuse, take the consequences. You will thus be the architect, in fact, of your own happiness, or your own grave-digger and sexton, if you prefer.”

Never yet has a Movement sprung up in which “love and forgiveness” has so full an application.

We may now bandage up Mr. Fleming’s cranium, and give the injection of sense a chance to do its redeeming work.

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

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