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EDITORIAL

AN ENEMY OF SOCIETY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

WE consider Henrik Ibsen's direct contributions to social science to be his three plays *The League of Youth*, *The Pillars of Society*, and *An Enemy of Society*. Of these, the last one, publication of which starts with this issue, pre-eminently conveys a lesson that the present militants in the Movement will appreciate, and that the many more who are now graduating into that class will profit by.

The hero of the play—an intellectual visionary, who, altho' and significantly enough, is a scientist in natural sciences, has no conception of the material sources of social conduct and the material foundation of social institutions—sails in to reform things. He is a veritable Ruy Blas¹ in so far as his career “starts {in the} manner of fowl.”

Soon as he propounds his reform, the hero receives encouragement from the “radical” press and petty bourgeois souls. These promise him a “compact majority” and the support of the {“}Householders Association,” the Temperance body, etc., etc.

All moved along swimmingly for a while—and then? Then the effect began to be noticed of the effectiveness of upper capitalist influence. One by one the supporters of our hero slide back. The pillars, upon which he relied crumble one after the other under some pretext, or another—all pulled off by higher economic influences. The “compact majority,” promised to, becomes a compact majority against, him until he is roundly denounced as “an enemy of society,” { . . . }ned² home, his windows broken, and himself and all the members of his family boycotted.

Nor does the lesson end there. Taken aback by the hostile reception that he received at a public meeting where he expected the applause of the “compact major-

¹ [Title character from a Victor Hugo novel published in 1890.—*Editor*.]

² [Portion of this word missing.—*Editor*.]

ity,” our hero first goes the way of the visionaries. His expectations having suffered shipwreck, the Nebuchadnezzar-like mixture of his theories is let fly at his foes in bits and chunks of thoughts, some golden, others brassy, many more of clay.

In the final upshot of all these experiences one imagines he reads the Marxian principle concerning the necessity of the various ranks of the proletariat being first beaten down to a common level, before they can come into possession of their common class instincts, when, having acquired the class power of such possession, they will rise up as one—and triumph. A similar lesson is conveyed by a work of very different tendency, written by an author of a different clime,—the Spaniard’s Alarcon’s *Escandalo*,—where the hero of the story, having stripped himself of all his havings that rendered him subject to his foes, becomes master of the situation. So in Ibsen’s play. Left in the lurch by the interests upon which he leaned, our hero gathers energy from his own isolation. The play ends there. But the indications are sufficient to warrant the conclusion that our hero’s defeat marks the starting point of his subsequent march to victory.

The *An Enemy of Society* might have been written this year, with the scene placed in any American city. It is alive with living experience.

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