

# DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 12, NO. 21.

NEW YORK, FRIDAY, JULY 21, 1911.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

## FATHER GASSONIANA.

By DANIEL DE LEON

XVII.

**I**N a way, it should seem superfluous to take up here the defense of Materialism, one of the features of Socialism that the Jesuit Father Thomas I. Gasson rebuked in his Boston, February 6, address. The exposure made of the opposite theory in the twelfth article of this series might be deemed a sufficient demonstration of the correctness of the materialist philosophy. Nevertheless the demonstration having been negative, having consisted only in exposing the untenableness of the opposite philosophy, a positive, direct demonstration is demanded by the weightiness of the subject. If one of two disputants maintains that  $2+2=16$ , it does not follow that the demonstration of  $2+2$  not making 16, is equivalent to the demonstration of the proposition that  $2+2$  make 36, that may be advanced by the other disputant.

The materialist philosophy is not a deduction from assumed premises. It is the induction from facts carefully ascertained and construed together. These facts history furnishes in abundance. They leave room for no alternative other than either reject the facts as false, an impossible thing; or, accept the materialist conclusion to which these facts point. From the inexhaustible quarry of historic facts a few leading ones will suffice.

The sense that involuntary poverty is an evil to him who is afflicted therewith is found in all literature, and in all ages. The sense of the evil has affected people in two ways. What those ways were is typified by the best types of the people differently affected. Isaiah and Plato may be taken as the oldest types of one set; Aristotle and Xenophon as the oldest types of the other set.

The set typified by Isaiah and Plato undertook to remove the affliction of involuntary poverty, then and there. Their reasoning was that, involuntary poverty being an evil, the moral sense must revolt against it; and, seeing that morality could not abide by the sufferings of mankind, all that was needed was to render man moral. A quickened morality was to establish paradise on earth—Isaiah's "Kingdom

of the Lord of Hosts”, Plato’s *Republic*.

The set typified by Aristotle and Xenophon looked upon involuntary poverty as an evil, but a necessary, an unavoidable evil. The Aristotelian passage, cited by Marx,—“If every tool, when summoned, or even of its own accord, could do the work that befits it, just as the creations of Daedalus moved of themselves, or the tripods of Hephaestos went of their own accord to their sacred work, if the weavers’ shuttles were to weave of themselves, then there would be no need either of apprentices for the master workers, or of slaves for the lords”—this passage strikes the key-note of the reasoning of this set.

There is not on record, in the history of intellectual development, another instance of an error of judgment embodying a truth of such colossal proportions as the error which the Aristotle-Xenophonian school uttered in the passage cited above. There is no other instance of error big with such constructive powers. The Aristotle-Xenophonian school looked upon involuntary poverty as unavoidable because the tool did not move of itself. Under such mechanical conditions, the alternative was—either economic dependence, that is, involuntary poverty, for all, with leisure, hence, the opportunity for intellectual expansion for none; or, economic dependence, hence, involuntary poverty with its train of sufferings for the masses, and the consequent economic independence for some.

The Aristotle-Xenophonian school grasped the sociologic law that decreed intellectual progress. Pardonably unable to project itself into the future so far ahead as the time when mechanical conditions would be so radically revolutionized that the “weavers’ shuttles would weave of themselves”, this school considered slavery, which meant labor and poverty, to be unavoidable. By so doing the Aristotle-Xenophonian school planted itself upon material conditions as the prime factor to determine social institutions and morality. The fruitfulness of their posture is inestimable.

In the first place, it was a shield against wishes that were impracticable. The Isaiah-Platonian school, by aspiring and grasping at a goal for which society afforded no material foundation, led from disappointment to disappointment, and finally to the psychologic spot where the road forks—one road striking in the direction of extreme Reaction, to a frame of mind in which the well-spring of lofty sentiments is dried up, and the masses are looked upon as brutish herds, who get no worse than they deserve when starved or beaten over the head into quiet; the other road striking in the direction of Hypocrisy, the original sentiments being preserved

only in phrases, while actual conduct is hard to distinguish from Reaction—each of the two roads being worse than the other.

In the second place, the Aristotle-Xenophonian school furnished the key to the successive correction of whatever principle, which, however correct at one time, time may subsequently have rendered incorrect. By subjecting Aspiration to Material Possibilities, the key furnished by this school opened the portals for loftier and ever loftier sentiment in the measure that Aspirations, once lacking material foundation, were furnished with the same by the material conquests of advancing society, and things, once held impossible, had become accomplished facts. The passage from Aristotle cited by Marx contrasts the two schools, and it illustrates the incomparable superiority, moral and material, of the Aristotle-Xenophonian posture over the Isaiah-Platonian.

The Aristotle-Xenophonian is the Materialist Philosophy.

The Materialist Philosophy subordinates the Heart to the Mind. By so doing, the Materialist Philosophy is the Guardian of Social Morality.

Mass-humanity, the facts of history demonstrate, ever adapts its moral conceptions to its material needs. The Anti-Materialist does not, he can not escape that law of human action.

The Anti-Materialist not only cripples himself, he injures society. By expecting universal Good Will, the application of the Golden Rule, in short, ideal morality under conditions in which, for instance, “the weavers’ shuttles do NOT weave of themselves”, the Anti-Materialist renders himself stone blind to the advent of the material conditions when “the weavers’ shuttles DO weave of themselves.” Expecting the impossible, the Anti-Materialist impedes the inauguration of the possible. The consequence is inevitable. It is seen in the fact of the churches, the centers of Anti-Materialism, being filled with Reactionists and Hypocrites.

The Materialist, on the contrary, ever adapting Aspirations to Material Possibilities, never can inflict upon society the alternate and double injury of promoting Reaction, or Hypocrisy, or both. The highest possible Ideal that material conditions afford he stands for—none beyond that. Where material conditions,—as, for instance, when the mechanical appliances for production are so rudimental that the abundance needed for the welfare of all is a physical impossibility—his Mind will curb the beatings of the Heart, and he will abstain from preaching the New Jerusalem. He knows the deep morality of the warning against the shouting of “Peace, peace, where there is no peace”, and the deep damnation of the practice. On

the other hand, when material conditions have so improved—as, for instance, when the mechanical appliances for production have reached the present stage of perfection that an abundance for all is possible without arduous toil—then will the Materialist’s Mind give full rein to the throbbings of the Heart, and he will proclaim the advent of Man’s terrestrial wellbeing. He will do so because aware of the deep damnation of upholding “War, war, when there can be peace,” and the lofty morality of insisting that there be “Peace, peace, when there can be peace.”

Being the carrier of the highest Morality, Socialism is Materialist, Materialism being TRUE, Anti-Materialism FALSE, and false pretence.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.  
Uploaded April 2006