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EDITORIAL

REFORMERS POSING TO A PURPOSE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IT happens with the Socialist Movement as with the advancing columns of the white settlers in the tropics. As the flanks of the latter are harassed with clouds of insects, whose mission on earth seems to be to test the settlers' fortitude, the flanks of the former are beset also with a cloud of insects, the reformers, whose mission in the scheme of society seems to be to test the patience of the Movement—occasionally to furnish the Movement with matter for mirth.

An illustration of the at once jokey and nuisance essence of the reformer is furnished by a letter written by an Auburn ex-convict to Richard Harding Blake, who publishes the letter with the endorsement of its writer's present character for intelligence and veracity.

The letter contains these passages:

“Over one hundred delegates from all over the world, eager to find the true solution of the social problem and the means of abolishing all the wrongs and iniquities of our civilization, visited the two prisons (men's and women's), covering with their various industries more than forty acres of ground, in less than one hour.

“One must have seen how these delegates were rushed through the various departments and then endeavor to understand what these delegates saw and spoke about it at their congress in Washington, D.C. Let me state a few incidents which are worth mentioning.

“The dinner on that day (Tuesday) was supposed to be the regular meal, consisting of a foul smelling beef stew, one cup of water, only one cup, and dry bread. Just stop for a moment and think what kind of a heavy, hearty meal this is for men who are laboring hard at physical toil. It's the only square meal that is served during the day. Oh, these prison officials stopped to think and thought it best to have the kitchen keeper prepare something more solid, something that would look like a meal for that occasion, and so we had corned beef, vegetables, soup, coffee, bread and potatoes.

“This was one bluff these delegates were handed out, and they never knew it.”

If ever clowns posed for artists, it was these reformers, passing under the eyes of the observing convict; if ever the mental caliber of skimmers over weighty matter was exhibited and dotted down, it was when these reformers literally scurried over a field that should have bespoken deliberate walking; if ever the gullibility of the reformer, hence, also his and her readiness to “take in” others, was recorded, it was when these prison reformers had the wool pulled over their eyes by the Auburn prison officials.

The four paragraphs, quoted from the ex-convict’s letter, are positively masterly and the most masterly of all the strokes they contain is the passage in which the ex-convict artist declares that one must have seen how these reformers deported themselves, or allowed themselves to be handled, at Auburn in order to appreciate the speeches they made at the Washington, D.C., congress, whither they were bent, and where they bestowed their “experience” upon a patient world.

Well for this ex-convict—he has a keen eye for the grotesque, for humbug, for levity, in short, for the species “Reformer Vulgaris.”

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