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EDITORIAL

THE FIFTH AVENUE DUEL.

By DANIEL DE LEON

“**T**HIS”, it is often proclaimed, “is the land of equal opportunities.” Just at present the city is interested in the outcome of a little duel on Fifth avenue, that will aid considerably in showing the truth or untruth of this proclamation. This duel is not a physical but an economic one. John Jacob Astor and John D. Rockefeller are the principals. Astor owns a hotel at 55th street, which he plans to extend to 54th street. This Rockefeller opposes. He has a home at the corner of 54th street, the privacy of which he wishes to protect against the publicity to which the hotel extension would expose it. Injunctions, litigation and the purchase of contiguous property by both sides, are the thrusts and counter thrusts of the duel. City departments and courts are invoked, abutting interests enlisted, and entrenchment secured—in brief, wealth is freely expended by the two multi-millionaires—in order to gain the permanent advantage that will advance their respective interests.

Where, in this “land of equal opportunities”, is the small business man who possesses the necessary resources to enable him to avail himself of the opportunity to advance his picayune enterprise in the face of deadly competition, in the same manner that Astor advances the interests of his hotel in the face of Rockefeller’s onslaught, or Rockefeller advances the interests of his home despite Astor’s vigorous attacks?

Where, in this “land of equal opportunities”, are the workingmen who possess the economic means wherewith to utilize the opportunities to advance their wages and labor power in the face of the raids of the Manufacturers’ Association and the Citizens’ Alliance, in the same manner that these ultra-capitalists advance the respective interests of their hostleries and domiciles in their respective attacks on each other?

One may search high and low for specimens of such small business men and workingmen. They do not and cannot exist.

This is not a “land of equal opportunities”. It is a land of gross social, legal, economic and political inequalities, in which the opportunities for self-defense and advancement are in the possession of the ultra-capitalist class. All the remaining classes are dependent on this class, and subject to its control. This fact, the Fifth avenue duel—one of a myriad of similar instances—helps, by contrast, to make clear.

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