

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 10, NO. 120.

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 28, 1909.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

“WHITE SLAVERY.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

THAT prostitution is one of the pillars of capitalist society, without which that proud-pretentious structure would sag and crumble, is a well known fact to every scientist, even if he be no economist, and to every economist even if he be no scientist. Of this fact European scientists, especially of the medical profession, make no bones. Otherwise here in America.

The same poisonous breath that, here in the United States, debauches Art, rendering it subservient to the demands of commercialism, also palsies the tongue and pen of the medical science, to say nothing of official professorism, compelling it to be silent upon the subject, or, if it at all utters itself, to be disingenuous and hypocritical. The work of the American scientist, medical or otherwise, of standing that deals objectively with “prostitution” does not exist. Bourgeois requirements forbid the telling of the truth. The truth upon the subject, so far told, was hitherto spurned by the pharisaic bourgeois as “foreign,” hence, supposedly inapplicable to the land. The present municipal campaign in this city turns over a new leaf in the matter.

Driven by that spirit which the British economist Dunning pointed at as driving the capitalist, however timid he may otherwise be, to stick at no risk, even to the chance of being hanged, if there is a 300 per cent profit in prospect, the opposing subway syndicates, who are striving to win possession of the city administration, have started a line of vituperation, crimination and recrimination, met with pleas of confession and avoidance, which culminated in a state{ment} by William J. Gaynor that marks the closing of an old and the opening of a new era. Mr. Gaynor’s answer to the charge of rampant and systematic prostitution in the city was to refer the accusers to a number of leading authorities, among them Lecky, especially to what the latter says on the subject of prostitution “in the famous fifth chapter of his

History of European Morals.” That famous chapter contains this passage:

“There has arisen in society a figure which is certainly the most mournful, and in some respects the most awful, upon which the eye of the moralist can dwell. That unhappy being whose very name is a shame to speak; who counterfeits with a cold heart the transports of affection, and submits herself as the passive instrument of lust; who is scorned and insulted as the vilest of her sex, and doomed, for the most part, to disease and abject wretchedness and an early death, appears in every age as the perpetual symbol of the degradation and the sinfulness of man. Herself the supreme type of vice, she is ultimately the most efficient guardian of virtue. But for her, the unchallenged purity of countless homes would be polluted, and not a few who, in the pride of their untempted chastity, think of her with an indignant shudder, would have known the agony of remorse and of despair. On that one degraded and ignoble form are concentrated the passions that might have filled the world with shame. She remains, while creeds and civilizations rise and fall, the eternal priestess of humanity, blasted for the sins of the people.”

Even if it had been the blockhead Republican candidate Bannard, even if it had been the free-lance millionaire candidate Hearst, who cited Lecky, the act would have gone far to meet the deficiency of a recognized authority in and of the bourgeois world of America upon the function of prostitution in the bourgeois “order.” The citing of Lecky by Gaynor—a notability in the ruling upper crust of the country; a Judge of long and unimpeached standing; a celebrity frequently appealed to to head municipal and state tickets, and now heading the Independent and Democratic tickets in this city; a patrician, spoken of more than once as a Presidential possibility; a, by the bourgeois, admired paladin of “Law and Order” with an eye especially to morality; a, by the bourgeois, much venerated personage and a diligent reader and quoter of the Bible—the citing of Lecky by such a bright particular star in the capitalist firmament, and quoting particularly and especially that Fifth Chapter—that, henceforth, “cleanses” Lecky of the “foreign” stigma—that, henceforth, renders Lecky standard American authority.

Lecky is no Socialist. If he were he would not conclude that womanhood was always and is to remain eternally on the cross, “blasted for the sins of the people.” He would know that the crucifixion of womanhood is a crime of Property, and consequent Class Rule, and, consequently, endable as ended it will be by the

Socialist Revolution. All this nevertheless, Lecky’s Fifth Chapter, of which the above passage may be considered a summary, is justly famous. It is the admission by a master mind in the ruling class that its life is bottomed on others’ death; that its safety rests upon others’ wretchedness; that its virtue depends upon others’ vices; that its Christianity is a Lie.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded December 2010

slpns@slp.org