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EDITORIAL

Mr. Partington-Gallagher

At a recent conference, held in Hartford, Conn., of delegates of various charitable organizations, Mr. Francis Gallagher read a paper on “The best methods of preventing the present crowding of our streets with criminals.” In his address this passage occurs:

“The charitable institutions and insane asylums are all full to overflowing; they cannot be built fast enough to meet the multiplying requirements of social neglect. The demand is constant and urgent for more and larger ones. The most generous plan is found inadequate before it has been fairly completed, and the pressure of necessity greater than when it was begun.

“By carefully providing for its degenerate{s} and abnormals in comfortable prisons and asylums, giving them the advantage of the highest knowledge and science of living, society unwittingly aggravates the evil it seeks to alleviate. It maintains, also, those who would perish without its aid; it permits their reproduction and multiplication; it fosters with more attention than it gives its better types the establishment and increase of an abnormal and defective class. It not only perpetuates by care, but encourages by unrestricted breeding-in among them, the unnatural spread and growth of a social gangrene of fatal tendencies.

“Society is working at the wrong end of the subject. There can be no doubt that the degeneration of the race is due to the continuous development of humanity, tainted to a greater or less degree with various diseases and defects.”

And what is the remedy, which is the right end of the subject, according to Mr. Gallagher? Here it is:

“The marriage of the criminal and defective class must be prevented; and, indeed, marriage of all those affected with constitutional defects should be prohibited.”

Mr. Gallagher’s address bears the mark of much labor, it must be considered his best thought on the subject. And what does that “best” thought amount to? It amounts to the same thing that all bourgeois thought does.

That the charitable institutions, insane asylums, and the like are full to overflowing and are inadequate to the increasing demands made upon them is certain; certain also it is that an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure, and, hence, that the part of wisdom is to dry up the fountain whence an evil proceeds. But to imagine that the fount in this instance should be dried up by the trick of regulating, supervising and preventing marriage is to don the gown of Mrs. Partington, to arm one’s self with her mop and to start in to mop off the Atlantic ocean.

So long, thus reasons Mr. Partington-Gallagher, as criminals can be bred it is useless to hope to find sufficient asylums, etc., for them; so far so good. But the Partingtonian feature of the Gallagher reasoning lies in the remedy. For the same reason that asylums, houses of correction, etc., are becoming more and more inadequate to the suppression and correction of crime, the new machinery of government, which Mr. Partington-Gallagher proposes, will speedily become inadequate to its task of stopping marriages. The flood of criminals, like the waters that Mrs. Partington took for a cesspool, comes from broader and deeper sources than the marriage of criminals. It proceeds from the social system that renders want a feature of our society, that lowers the morals of the people by nipping their ideals in the bud, that drives men to grub for dollars as swine grub for swill, that deprives them of the opportunity (as it evidently has deprived Mr. Gallagher) of devoting time, leisure and love to the acquirement of a well-rounded education, that makes them superficial, narrow and flint-hearted by holding up successful robbery as cleverness.

The source of criminality lies not in the copulation of criminals, it lies in the capitalist system, that, bred in spoliation and born of rapine, thrives only by the manifold exhibitions of crime. Angels copulating in a capitalist society may produce beings that, the morrow, will be sent to prison. And criminals copulating under a social system where the opportunity to labor is free to all, where he who labors can receive the full returns of his efforts, and where labor, easy and light, as machinery now makes possible, becomes, not only honorable, but a source of affluence, would produce beings that would emulate angels.

The prevention of crime lies not in repression but in freedom—in the Socialist or Co-

operative Commonwealth. Purity of life among the masses is a flower that can blossom forth only upon the runs of capitalism and on the soil of Socialism.

Mr. Gallagher, in starting to suppress the wretched criminal, is taking the wrong sow by the ear. He should seek to suppress the capitalist class, THAT is the sow whose ear all intelligent men are after. But that, of course, would not suit Mr. Gallagher. He illustrates the truth of Tolstoi's words:

“The ruling class will do anything for the poor, except to get off their backs.”

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

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