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EDITORIAL

THE FALSTAFF IN ROOSEVELT.

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SINCE Theodore Roosevelt was appointed Police Commissioner in this city, his every act of any importance became a sign-post pointing to the direction that the march of civilization should avoid. When he was elected Governor, the enlarged opportunities for mischief were not wasted: the sign-posts grew in numbers. When he became President, the still more and vastly enlarged opportunities for the setting of horrible examples were greedily availed of. It may be cogently said of the political career of Theodore Roosevelt that it constitutes a compendium valuable in this respect, that its study furnishes the student of social growth with a knowledge of the principles, illumined by acts, which all lovers of human progress should NOT follow. That should be merit enough for one man. Around the personality of Theodore Roosevelt still greater merit clusters.

The leading speaker of the 139th annual banquet of the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, held on the 21st of this month at the Waldorf-Astoria, was ex-Senator John C. Spooner of Wisconsin. The Senator, once a tube through which the President tooted, has now become the President's adversary. Goaded by the President's words and actions, the Senator assailed him. His speech consisted of a string of superstitious praises of the Constitution: the Constitution was pronounced, not only the most magnificent instrument the human intellect had up to then conceived, which is true, but the most magnificent instrument the human intellect could ever conceive, which is not true: before that fetich he bid the nation bow: its sacred antiquity and its antique sacredness rendered it adequate in the past, renders it adequate to-day, and insures its adequateness for all time: to but pronounce against it is impiousness. The merit of Senator Spooner's sentiments, like the merit of Roosevelt's, lies in the impulse they give to the correct opposite and enlightened ones. The Senator's sentiments on the Constitution are cast in the mold

of a certain social principle—blind veneration for the Past. Profoundly and beautifully does Buckle express the sentiment that propels civilization, instead of retarding it: “Of all the various ways in which the imagination has distorted truth, there is none that has worked so much harm as an exaggerated respect for past ages. This reverence for antiquity is repugnant to every maxim of reason, and is merely the indulgence of a poetic sentiment in favor of the remote and unknown. It is this, for instance, which inspired the poets with their notion of a Golden Age. It is this, again, which gave the theologians their idea of the primitive virtue and simplicity of man, and his subsequent fall from that high estate.”

The Constitution was a superb instrument—for its time. It was admirably adapted—to the then conditions, indeed, the conditions that gave it birth. That time is gone by, those conditions are no more. The Constitution is an instrument for POLITICAL rule. As such it was a necessary instrument for capitalist government—that last stage of social evolution planted upon class distinctions. The era the Nation has now entered upon no longer needs the foundation of class distinctions for Progress. That foundation now retards Progress. The present era calls for an instrument of INDUSTRIAL rule. To venerate the Constitution, with the superstitious awe that Senator Spooner would have the Nation do, is not to honor, is to insult the Genius of that great instrument. No achievement, that is a step towards Progress, can be honored by conduct that would petrify it into a barrier against further Progress.

Subtle is the Rooseveltian influence. Like Falstaff, who was not only witty himself, but cause that wit was in others, Roosevelt not only himself stimulates progressive thought by the enunciation and practice of principles that are to be avoided, he is also cause that even his adversaries, in his own reactionary camp, such as Senator Spooner, are goaded by him into reactionary utterances, that, in turn, stimulate further progressive thought.

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

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