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EDITORIAL

## A MODERN CAGLIOSTRO.

By DANIEL DE LEON

**A**S every age has its vices, and every vice has its symptoms, so, inversely, every special symptom of a vice characterizes the age in which it springs up. A Cagliostro could not flourish to-day. Science has swept away credulity. For a Cagliostro credulity was necessary. The Cagliostros were peculiarly an eighteenth century phenomenon. On the same principle a Mrs. Chadwick never could have flourished in the eighteenth century. The special vice on which the Mrs. Chadwick weed thrives is one that was alien in the eighteenth century, France especially. It is the vice of hypocrisy concerning marital relations among the ruling class. That is, if not the, at any rate one of the typical vices of the modern ruler, the capitalist. In the eighteenth century a gigantic fraudulent scheme to raise large sums of money from the wealthy had needs to be pivoted on the foible of the expected dupes. Credulity being their characteristic foible, a Cagliostro could hocus-pocus them with the belief of his mysterious powers to manufacture gold. Playing both upon the foible and upon the delirious craving for fabulous wealth that is common to all critical periods of society, the Cagliostros of the eighteenth century lived in clover at the expense of the then ruling class. The identical manifestation—only pivoted upon the modern “foible”—is now seen reproduced in our own Mrs. Chadwick.



CASSIE CHADWICK  
(1857–1907)

There is nothing actually mysterious in the career of Mrs. Chadwick, any more than there was in that of Cagliostro. Mystified are only those whose habits of thought incline to the marvelous. There is skill, a deep knowledge of the times, and vast dexterity, but nothing miraculous, any more than in a clever sleight-of-hands.

Mrs. Chadwick scented correctly the atmosphere of modern decadence—just as Cagliostro did of his time. That told her, as clearly as certain atmospheric impressions notify the rabbit of approaching rain, that money was the burden of the every thought of the capitalist. She no more than Cagliostro knew economics, yet with the accuracy of a Dunning she knew instinctively that, for a 300 per cent. in prospect, there is no lengths the capitalist would not go, including the length of risking his own neck. Her correct instinct told her that, and supplemented the information with a knowledge of the fact that domestic immorality is a cardinal feature of the “sanctity-of-the-family-upholding” capitalist class. Corner-stoned upon these two facts, Mrs. Chadwick boldly reared her superb structure of fraud. And she did it skilfully. She displayed promissory notes for over a million dollars endorsed by a well-known multi-millionaire, and upon the notes she asked for loans from bank officials, promising usurious interests. She got the loans. The aim was unerring. What leading capitalist will not readily believe that his fellow professional leads an indecent home life?—He knows his own too well for that: the signature of a multi-millionaire on a large note, and this in the hands of an attractive woman, is prima facie evidence of the genuineness of the signature. And what capitalist will not risk his neck for a huge lump of profit?—None of course. And so the banker was caught, and Mrs. Chadwick flourished.

While half-baked morality and par-boiled philosophy will philosophically moralize on the deep turpitude of Mrs. Chadwick, and pronounce sermonettes on the punishment that “ever overtakes the guilty,” the Socialist draws from the Chadwick incident the only lessons worth drawing—and valuable both:

—The sanctity-of-the-family-upholding posture of the capitalist class is a posture of pharisaism;

—The capitalist class of this generation is, like the feudal class of the eighteenth century, at the period of decadence that breeds, incites and attracts the modern Cagliostros.

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

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