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EDITORIAL

FATHER GASSONIANA.

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X.

ATENTH proposition of a general nature, advanced by Father Thomas I. Gasson in his anti-Socialist address delivered in Boston on February 6, was that “it is a matter of history that the clergy, as a rule, have championed the cause of Labor.” This proposition, which, taken in its context, correctly implies that the clergy, as a rule, is at daggers drawn with the Socialist, incorrectly implies that, therefore, the Socialist is wrong and the clergy right. Advanced in the “easy, conversational way,” that the *Boston Post*, which reports Father Gasson’s address, reports the Father to have spoken, the proposition seem to have been uttered with the assurance that are uttered propositions which need not challenge refutation, seeing they are so undeniable as never to have been denied.

The facts in the case are all the other way.

Of course, the condition of the working class, in countries and regions where the Roman Catholic polity has lost almost all, if not all the hold it once had, that is, the countries dominated by the capitalist polity, is far from desirable; it may even be designated as horrible. It may even be granted that, all things considered, the sufferings of the working class are, in such countries worse than, in many respects, they were before. This by no means proves the clergy the champion of Labor.

The philosophy of history teaches that suffering is not the staff by which to gauge a people’s status on the scale of progress. Socialist science points out that, in all likelihood, the Hottentot suffers less than the Russian peasant; the Russian peasant less than the workers in the German Empire; the workers in the German Empire less than their fellow proletarians of Great Britain; the proletariat of Great Britain less than their fellows in the United States. Nevertheless, the status of Labor in the United States is superior to what it is in Great Britain; in Great Britain superior to what it is in the German Empire; in the German Empire superior to what it is in Russia; in Russia superior to what it is in Hottentotia. Why? For the reason that in Hottentotia social conditions are at the bottom of the

ladder, several rungs higher in Russia, many more rungs higher in Germany, perceptibly higher still in Great Britain, highest of all in the United States—hence affording to Labor a nearer and better opportunity to cast off all social suffering. As the *Daily People* has more than once pointed out, when Fred Douglass, shortly before his death, stated that the condition of his race, the Negro, was then tangibly worse than when still slave, he probably stated an actual truth, but certainly a sociologic untruth. Each social stage has sufferings peculiar to itself, and the sufferings in the higher may be peculiarly more trying than the sufferings in the lower—as happens with higher organisms in biology. All the same, the Negro, as wage-slave, enjoys a status superior to that of chattel-slave. The very fact of being so much nearer, indeed, within reach of actual freedom, affords the wage-slave Negro fruitions not imaginable to the chattel-slave.

Of course, as stated before, the conditions of Labor are actually horrible under the capitalist polity; may be, as before stated, these conditions inflict upon Labor sufferings that are intenser than those endured under the Roman Catholic polity. The test of championship of the cause of Labor is not a comparison of Labor conditions under the two polities. The test is the activity or non-activity of the clergy in raising Labor up the ladder to the point of total emancipation. What was that activity? The answer that history makes is diametrically the opposite of Father Gasson's proposition.

William Cobbett's work upon the condition of the poor before and after the Reformation in England conveys information that Father Gasson may not gainsay, seeing the work earned for its author an autograph and complimentary letter from the then incumbent in the papal chair. Cobbett described how the mass of roving poor were, before the Reformation, taken care of by the monasteries, and how, after the Reformation, the monasteries having been sequestered with nothing to take the place of their benevolent work, the poor were left to the mercy of the elements, to starve and freeze. The championship of the clergy is there exhibited as consisting in almsgiving—hardly a championship for the elevation of Labor.

Leaping forward to our own days, we find on page 127 (G.P. Putnam's Sons 1908 edition) of *The Modernist Programme*, issued by leading prelates of Roman Catholicism in point of intelligence and piety, but repudiated by the dominant chieftains of the Roman Catholic polity, the following tell-tale indictment:

“What sort of sympathy is she [the Roman Catholic Church or polity] to win from the best spirits of the age by these wretched remnants of a power

that she has lost, or by her vain efforts to re-acquire it? What sort of popularity can these dwindling and decrepit aristocratic oligarchies confer upon her which, in exchange for a little paltry grandeur, would tie her to customs in open discord with modern tendencies? One thing we know, and we say it openly: we know that we are weary of seeing the Church reduced, for all practical purposes, to a bureaucracy jealous of its surviving scraps of political power and hungering to get back all it once had—to a group of idle men who, having dedicated themselves to a priestly and apostolic calling, and having afterwards attained the highest ecclesiastical grade, enjoy the most fabulously wealthy benefices as absentee incumbents. We are weary of seeing her reduced to a sterilized force, which, notwithstanding an apparent grandeur that wins the facile and unintelligent adulation of the multitude, acts as a brake on social progress;”—hardly a championship that Labor can profit from.

Finally, coming to a category of facts taken from the immediate present, we see Labor in France, in Italy, in Portugal, and now in Spain also—all of these Catholic countries—the instant it gains its voice, place the demand for the expulsion of monks and nuns, clergymen, generally, at the head of the list of their demands, ahead even of the demand for bread—a pathetic sight, on the part of those most intimately and long familiar with their championship by the Roman Catholic clergy.

Neither the allegation by Father Gasson in opposition to the Socialists and in favor of the clergy, as the fitter element for Labor's improvement, nor the placid confidence with which the allegation was made, is borne out by the facts.

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