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EDITORIAL

IF LINCOLN KNEW!

By DANIEL DE LEON

IT should not require the analytical penetration of a Poe to discern the peculiarly ignoble use that noble Lincoln has been put to—or attempted to be put to—by his this year’s praise-singers.

At the recurring anniversaries of the Washingtons, the Jeffersons and other celebrities of the land, their great achievements and their distinguished abilities are extolled. This, indeed, was also done with regard to Lincoln. Nevertheless in this year’s “Lincoln orations,” or articles,—whether proceeding from Canadian Goldwin Smith, or Presidential Roosevelt; whether proceeding from Carnegie, or this Senator, or that Representative, or any of the raft of vocal College Presidents;—a particular effort was made to particularly emphasize a LIE—the alleged “pinching poverty” of Lincoln’s youth “which in nothing interfered with his march to headship.”

The “pinching poverty” of many of our truly great men is usually a mere poetic fiction to answer rhetorical exigencies. In the instance of Lincoln, this year—in the midst of the intensifying consequences of an unparalleled crisis; with over a thousand “vagrants” admittedly killed and injured by one single railroad line; with the large number of bankruptcies telling of untold and secretly borne privations; with breadlines swelling with thousands of people admittedly there through no fault of their own; with a simultaneous brazen display of increasingly Asiatic luxury; and with, as a consequence, wide-spreading, and all the more ominous because still silent, discontent—at such a time the outburst of macaronics, indulged in over Lincoln’s “pinching poverty,” is a deliberate fabrication for a purpose.

No doubt the migrations from Kentucky to Indiana, Illinois and farther West, to which the Lincoln family belonged, were not undertaken on railroads. No doubt these emigrants did not enjoy the comforts of running water, that did not always

run; of gas, less yet electric lights; of the facilities of closets within doors that bred typhus; or the luxuries of a great variety of canned and embalmed edibles. No doubt the pictures of their log cabins compare badly with the pretentious stone front double-deckers in which the workers are to-day pigeon-holed. Nevertheless “pinching poverty” was alien to the former.

Though humble in aspect, there was dignity to their homes. As to food, all the works descriptive of those days—those works not being written to order at a season when Plunder and Exploitation are beginning to reap the hurricane, and when it is deemed advisable to narcotize into imbecile acquiescence the truly poverty pinched of to-day—those works tell a tale very different from that of “pinching poverty.” The work *The Making of a Nation*, for instance, makes particular mention of the Lincoln family itself. The Lincolns’ wedding feast was not exquisite, but ample and good. It would feed whole breadlines of to-day. The wild turkey was a meal ready for the emigrant’s gun to bring down, and fresh fish, and fresh air, and personal dignity raised the Lincoln generation far above the carping cares and irritations that the poverty, known of to-day, afflicts the masses with.

If the man who said: “The candid citizen must confess that if the policy of the government, upon vital questions affecting the whole people, is to be irrevocably fixed by decisions of the Supreme Court, the people will have ceased to be their own rulers”—if the man, who prophetically, and warningly and rebelliously uttered these words, only knew to what uses the Spirit that he fought, and overthrew, but has re-risen is seeking to turn his anniversary!

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

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