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EDITORIAL

VICARIOUS ENJOYMENT.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE news from Newcastle and Portsmouth reads like a cross between a fairy tale and a debauch. The Russian and Japanese envoys, together with Mrs. Mead and other wives of the American dignitaries who are “doing the honors” of the land to the foreign diplomats, seem to be having the time of their lives. They are reported to be sitting at tables, “the menu of which includes salmon, lobster and chicken salad, capon, sirloin of beef, game pie, ham, pâté de foie gras, rolls, cakes, ice cream, raspberries and cream, tea and coffee, and wines”. Besides this, the men are reported to be treated to “long and fragrant cigars” and automobile rides. There can be no wonder that “all concerned are enjoying themselves famously”, as the reports run. But are those “concerned” only the ones who are partaking of these goodies? What of the working class that produced the viands and the other delectable things? Are they not “concerned”—tho’ somewhat remotely as it would seem?

About fifteen years ago the Tammany administration of this city banqueted and feasted right royally another batch of foreign grandees, running up a bill of upwards of \$25,000 against the city. An injunction suit was started against the Comptroller enjoining him from honoring the draft. The matter thus came into Court; it so happened that the Judge, before whom the case was argued, was an old man of old-fashioned principles; he listened with increasing indignation at the counsel against the injunction, and gave his decision in short order. It was to the effect that he could see no reason why the people of the city should “pay for meals that they had not eaten, for wines that they had not drunk, for cigars that they had not smoked, or for music that they had not heard”. The Tammany dignitaries had to foot their own bills.

Judge Van Vorst, the Judge in question, evidently did not believe in vicarious

eating, drinking, smoking and hearing music. But the crabbed old man failed to catch the spirit of the age in which he still was lingering. Only suffering must the Working Class of the country undergo themselves; everything else they must undergo vicariously. Cobbett said pithily enough: “The Army, the Navy, the Treasury are His Majesty’s, the Public Debt is the people’s own”. And so the workers’ per capita of wealth is owned by them vicariously—the capitalist idler holds it in their name; the “prosperity of the land” is enjoyed vicariously—the capitalist idler relishes it exclusively; the glory of the nation, that rests upon the workers’ shoulders is refracted upon them vicariously—the capitalist idler absorbs all the rays. Why not have the workers also eat, drink, smoke and ride automobiles vicariously at Newcastle and Portsmouth, as they are doing?

The Newcastle-Portsmouth performances, on the national stage on which they are performed, may be providentially intended by the aroused Spirit of the Age to put to the pinched and sorely tried Working Class of America the question:—

“How do you like vicarious enjoyment? Would ye not be your own Judge Van Vorst?”

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