

EDITORIAL

THE CLOISTER SPIRIT RE-RISING.

By DANIEL DE LEON

ONE is apt to remain so long in amazed contemplation of the tragic scene enacted on last January 27, when, clasping each other in their arms, a young working woman and a working man deliberately rose on the trestle over Newton Creek in New Jersey, and were hurled out of existence by the trolley train which thundered over them, that the era-feature of the occurrence runs risk of being blotted out in the pathos of the incident.

The Cloister spirit is re-rising in our generation. The fact is no mean symptom of the era the race is now traversing. It was not the desire for learning that raised of old the Cloister walls of old. The desire for study, and the needed seclusion, contributed its share; or, rather, availed itself of the opportunity offered by other sentiments to burn in peace the midnight oil of meditation. What raised the Cloister walls was a sentiment akin to the panic that at times overcomes armies. A sense of helplessness in the presence of a danger, thought to be too powerful to think of overcoming, and therefore clothed in the mind with mysterious and uncanny attributes. Before the animal wolves and the worse human wolves that prowled over field and road, the weak retreated. It was a withdrawal from the world and its conflicts; it was a sort of suicide that not infrequently took on the actual features of suicide with those who took to the deserts. The Cloister Age is also marked by the Robber Burg. As much a twin social phenomenon as a cause of the Cloister, the Robber Burg rose as the asylum of the organized strong. Where Robber Burg and Cloister dot hills and valleys, society, such as it is, presents three groups—the deserting weak, at one extreme; the aggressive strong, at the other extreme; and a mass of unorganized humanity, too strong to desert, too weak to “take the law in its own hands,” and preyed upon by the social vultures.

Cloisters, as they once looked, are too much at variance with the present spirit

of the Age. The essence, however, of the Cloister of old is found in the suicides of to-day. That these are essentially Cloister spirits, deserters from the fray, is evidenced by the rise of the ill-concealed Robber Burgs of to-day, the capitalist establishments, the brigand consolidations of Trusts, Syndicates and Corporations, from whose fastnesses swoop down the vultures that exploit the unorganized masses—not a few of whom take refuge in the Cloister of Suicide.

Out of the Cloister and desultory Robber Burg Age grew a luminous Age, though the order was that of despotism. An infinitely more brilliant day is dawning for the human race; an Age when order will prevail without despotism; an Age when the virtues, now sneered at as weakness, will not need to resort to the seclusion of the Cloister, whether ancient or modern; an Age when the industries of the land, organized democratically, will render life too sweet and precious to be flung away under trolley trains, and when the dismantled Robber Burgs of Capitalism will no longer hover over the heads of the masses as storm clouds, ready any moment to discharge their death-dealing bolts.

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