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EDITORIAL

ONE OF THE SCENES IN A PLAY.

By DANIEL DE LEON

[A ROOM in the White House. On a side table to the right are the remains of a capon, two empty bottles of Burgundy, and one half empty. Cigar stumps on the mantle piece and on the floor. On a table to the left, writing materials—ink-well, fool's-cap and pens—in wild disorder, flanked by a bottle of Curacao tonic. Near this table a lounge bearing signs of recent occupation. On it lies an open copy of Hamlet, severely thumbed. A beam of the moon piercing the window-pane falls upon the book. The room is brilliantly lighted from above by a gorgeous electrical chandelier.

[A man is walking up and down with slow and measured steps. His port is Falstaffian, and, like Falstaff's, his face bears the signs of gluttony and high living. His gait, however, is Hamletian, according to the Booth-Barrett interpretation of the character, with drooping and pensive head, also an occasional strut and start a la Talma, whom Napoleon I is said to have taken for model. His hair is tumbled. Coat and vest half buttoned. Feet eased in slippers. It is the President of the United States—William H. Taft. He is preparing his annual message to the regular session of the 62nd Congress. He soliloquizes.]

“These first Mondays in December come with altogether too rapid a succession.—That message must be got ready

“All the regulation routine items are covered. But I have to say something upon the high prices. (Sighs.) It should be something original. What shall I say? (Steps to the table to the right, fills a glass, empties it, and starts pacing the room anew.)

“Aldrich would have me say: ‘The country counts the existing high prices among the many blessings poured upon it by an all-kind Providence. High prices denote plenty of money, plenty of money is a proof of prosperity. We are a prosperous nation.’

“But that will never do. Would not that scamp of a La Follette like me to say that, tho’! Would he not jump up with the question: ‘What is the use of plenty of money if the banking syndicate got its clutches upon it, and kept the farmer and the common people at its mercy?’

“How could I answer that? Let’s see. (Walks about.)

“I might say: ‘the richer the banker, the richer the manufacturer, and the richer the manufacturer the richer the far-m-er—no that answer will never do. I shall need the farmer’s vote. If I told him such a lie he would burn me in effigy. No I mustn’t listen to Aldrich. Have listened to him too long for my good. (Walks and grunts.)

“High prices—yes—how account for them?—‘an international move disconnected with conditions in any one country?’—that won’t do either. Those howling Socialists would ask me whether I forgot what I said two years ago—it was Root who suggested that passage to me, blast him!—‘our resources raise us above the trials that all other and less favored nations are subject to’.—

“High prices (stops in his walk) high prices (starts to walk again) high prices—what about that gold argument? (Steps to the table and pours another glass of wine down his throat.) Why, yes—gold—that’s it. Yes. I’ve got it—‘The high prices are due to the cheapening of gold’—here I shall have the Secretary of Commerce and Labor give me a pageful of statistics as fillers—How was it, again?—‘The high prices are due to the cheapening of gold. Consequently the term “high prices” is a misnomer. Nobody suffers from it. One merchant can recoup himself upon another, and so all along the line, in the end none is the worse’—hooray!

“But hold—The Socialists—I’ll take another drink—(he does and proceeds to pace the room). Yes, those wild-eyed fellows say in answer: ‘That would be all very well, provided the employer allowed his workmen to recoup themselves too and charge higher wages; but the employer resists, and when we strike for higher wages he calls us rioters, and treats us as such.’ This is a tough nut to crack. The way the workman comes off in the matter leads plump up to what they call the ‘Social Question!’ The Socialist answer is certain to be elicited by the ‘gold argument.’ Guess I had better say nothing about gold.

“But I must say something about High prices’—What argument shall I use!?”

(Paces the room in silence; turns off the electric light and walks towards the lounge to lie down; suddenly he starts back; his eyes having fallen upon the moonlit passage which he reads aloud:)

“The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right.”

(Growls an oath; kicks Hamlet off the lounge; lays himself down and tries to cozen sleep.)

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