

EDITORIAL

“BEHIND THE CURTAIN.”

By DANIEL DE LEON

A TIMELY book, written by a Roman Catholic priest who adopts the “nom de plume” of L’Abbe de Lacroix, and bearing the title that heads this article, is just published by the Seemore Company of Chicago, Ill.

Behind the Curtain is true to its name. From cover to cover—we wish it were larger, and hope its appearance heralds other such books—its 171 pages are full of revelations concerning the mental and physical workings of that stupendous political and business machine that has so often in the world’s history broken its own back by the weight of its own prelatical ambition, that has so often dashed its head against the resistless power of the human mind on the march to Progress, that has so often been driven to the criminal’s dock at the bar of human conscience by the impulse of its own marked Dr. Jekyll-and-Mr. Hyde characteristics, and yet has as often re-risen to conspicuousness, and again, in a way, now holds the center of the stage—Ultramontane Roman Catholicism.

Socialist Science holds the key to the understanding of portentous phenomenon. *Behind the Curtain* furnishes no new key, nor does it improve the old and scientific one; nevertheless the book is a valuable contribution to the literature of the present Social Question. The facts it furnishes are “fresh from the oven.” Tho’ it improve not the key, *Behind the Curtain*, by marshaling the facts of history that now is a-making, adds swing to the arm of that truly redemptory international Movement of Socialism to use the key with the increasing conscious ascendancy that comes from the confirmation of principle.

Socialist Science explains the bitter hostility of Ultramontane Roman Catholicism as the consequence of the instinctive sense of danger that Class Rule scents in the economic emancipation of the masses, Ultramontane Roman Catholicism being

the time-tried sensitive nerve of Class Rule. *Behind the Curtain* mentions one after another the concrete instances in Ultramontane Roman Catholicism in this country of that which economic and sociologic science designates as the material foundation and earmarks of Class Rule—the mundane arrogance of the cloister, the money-madness of the hierarchy, their brutal disregard of the rights of their parishioners, their blind autocracy, their blinder confidence in the permanent efficacy of such methods. Three passages may be profitably cited as summarizing concrete instances:—

“Considerable portions of the tremendously large sums as raised for the purpose of purchasing church-property are being spent for anything but that end. In the Middle West there is a church the pastor of which contracted an indebtedness of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars to build a church which cost one hundred and fifty thousand. The enormous balance of six hundred thousand dollars thus left was ‘invested’ rather recklessly in speculation in gold mines, stock-exchanges and gambling.”

And this other passage:

“When the archbishop of New York returned from Rome a newly-made Cardinal some two years ago, he was the recipient of a purse of twenty thousand dollars ‘to defray his expenses.’ Now, the Cardinal did not pay his expenses individually, so this purse should have been offered the diocese; his incomes are so plentiful that he really does not need any financial assistance. He might have turned over this money to some charitable purpose. Granted. This does not alter the awkwardness of the situation. Not in the least, because in that twenty thousand dollars there was included a great deal of money needed by the poor. And suppose a few rich people had subscribed that amount, even this would not make things look much better, because it does not look good, anyway, if someone gets paid for the same work twice, or if he is given the money for what has been paid already by others.”

And this passage:

“There are approximately fifteen million Catholics living in the States. They have contributed for so-called church-property over a thousand million of dollars and are being crowded down to such an extent that they are being taught, and if need be, openly told, to pay and to shut up. As the natural result of such a situation many bishops and priests would do just as they please and it is sad to say that oppression, graft and riotous and scandalous living are not exceptional occurrences.”

Needless to cite further passages, nor the passages that denote revolt within the camp of Ultramontanism. Those here quoted, and the purview of *Behind the Curtain*, sufficiently recommend the work to the wide-awake. It is modern history; modern history in our own country; history, moreover, that all should prime themselves who, fathoming the deep meaning of the Jesuit tenet—“What is not known does not exist”—make sure of not allowing to non-exist, through not knowing, matter that all should know in the interest of Light against Darkness, Freedom against Despotism, the Straight Path against the crooked, in short, Socialism against Class Rule.

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