

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 3, NO. 309.

NEW YORK, TUESDAY, MAY 5, 1903.

ONE CENT.

EDITORIAL

THE MODERN CLOISTER.

By DANIEL DE LEON

MAY those, still capable of thinking, who boast that the race is beyond the “dark, mediaeval days of cloisterdom,” read, and ponder over, the below letter—the last message to the outer world—left by Ida White, a young woman in this city, on the 3d instant, in this year of grace, 1903, before immuring herself in that modern cloister, the gloomiest of cloisters,—DEATH BY SUICIDE.

“The people I must leave, whom I loved and idolized, I want to say these last words, hoping you will believe them true, because they are written in the presence of death.

“I have wanted to do this for a long time, but something always came up to make it necessary to delay. But now the time has come when I must leave you all, and it is hard, because I know that had it depended on me alone I could have left you in a much better way, with good works behind me. But I blame no one, for I cannot understand many things.

“What I do understand is that all of the people I cared for are good and true. If they did not understand me, therefore, I cannot help leaving them. Very few people have I met who did not deserve love and respect, and those I did not care for at all were not deceived.

“My last prayer and my dearest hope is for the happiness of those I love, and my spirit will be happy if those I love will be good and happy. If they should suffer through me, I could not find peace even in my grave; so if they would grant my dearest wish let them try to realize this hope, and let them remember I alone am responsible for my death, unless one counts in faith.

“I wish to ask one boon of the people who will handle my case. Whatever I thought of at this time, I dread the process that follows such a death as mine. And, yet, in spite of my great horror, I must die. I beg of you to be generous. I beg of you to be generous to me and treat my body respectfully. I have deserved the granting of this last wish, for I have suffered much.

“I can only plead, and leave the rest on your generosity. For the sake of my innocent sisters and brothers, who love me, do not cast slurs on my memory. I cannot defend myself from you, for I cannot know you by my soul. I must leave it to those who are magnanimous to defend me. When we seek for the truth

without malice, but with true sympathy, we can always find it.

“It is only those who are ready to believe evil, rather than good, who always complain they cannot find truth. For the opinion of these I do not care. Good-by, sweet people; think kindly of me, for in my heart there is only love for you.”

The form, shape, color, shade or brand of the religion of the Middle Ages is not what raised or filled the cloisters. Something else was at bottom; something else was the solid foundation on which they rested, and the plentiful spring from which their inmates, male and female, flowed into, and overflowed them. And what was that? The bitter conflict between the aspirations of the heart and the stony facts that crushed them; between seeming possibilities of well-being and actual experience of distress; finally, and as a result thereof, mental bewilderment at a contradiction that the victims of society could not explain, and, unable to solve the riddle, lost heart, gave up the struggle, despite the horror of leaving the world, fled and took asylum behind walls—the thick cloister walls—, that shut off the seething stream of suffering, struggling humanity, and gave the fleers the quiet and insensibility of a living tomb.

Ida White’s letter portrays identical struggles, identical bewilderments, identical flight. She had “suffered much”; she “could not understand many things”; and, “in spite of the great horror” she had for the step, she took it,—fled for asylum in suicide.

Are we, then, to-day, no better than the Middle Ages? If it were so, less were the pity. But we are worse.

In the Middle Ages universal human happiness was an impossibility. Wealth was not then producible in volumes large enough to afford to all that material well-being that is the ground work for mental and spiritual expansion. Suffering for the masses was unavoidable. The mental bewilderment that overcame the less favored was not, then, imputable to man, and the cloister was but the expression, the visible envelope, fashioned in masonry, of the backward social state, for which none, or no set of men, was responsible.

’Tis otherwise to-day. Wealth is to-day producible in such phenomenal volume that material well-being, with all that implies, is affordable to all. Yet, that notwithstanding, the pinching poverty of the masses continues,—infanticide, insanity, inebriety, divorce are on the increase. A class is to-day in existence—the capitalist class—who uphold, and,

therefore, are responsible for, such evils, and whose spokesmen—the capitalist professors, parsons, politicians and press—preach the lie that as things are they cannot be otherwise. What else can the preachings of such “head-lights” of society produce but bewilderment in minds not yet enlightened by Socialist thought? They “suffer much”; they “cannot understand many things”; and they rush, in increasing numbers, to that which is the cloister of capitalist-ridden society,—SUICIDE.

As the cloister of the Middle Ages was the ocular expression of that age’s impotence, suicide, to-day, is the fittingly blood-bespattered expression of the wilful criminality of capitalist society.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded December 2006