

ARTICLE

IS DEPEW AN IDLER?

By DANIEL DE LEON

PEOPLE who are inclined to look upon [Chauncey Depew](#) as an idler should study the matter more closely. If they do they can not but reverse their judgment. Chauncey does not work very hard in production, but he is a mighty consumer. What he turns out is not very great in quantity, but what he



CHAUNCEY M. DEPEW, (1834–1928)

turns in is great both in quantity and quality. The proof of this can be drawn from many different sources. First, from patent medicine advertisements; second, from recommendations of articles in the eating and drinking line; third, from accounts of the banquets at which he leads the unterrified in their attempts to scale the heights of the menu, and plant their flag on the tiny glass of liqueur, that is the “well done, thou good and faithful servant” of the industrious diner.

While Depew spends his days and nights attending the funeral rites of good dinners, it must not be thought that he can expend all this energy without due preparation. A cursory glance at the advertising pages of the magazines and newspapers reveals the source of his gigantic powers as a feeder.

He recommends various table waters that improve the complexion, unclog the liver, polish up the kidneys, sharpen the appetite, and brighten the eyes. Then he takes a Pail of Pills for Pink People to accomplish the same end. They are scarcely in his midst when he takes a Cart of Little Liver Pills, and, for the sake of the Anglo-Saxon Alliance, he indulges in a few of those imported dainties known as Screechem’s Pills. But man liveth not by pills alone, and, though trusting to the pillular news, we might be led to believe that Depew lives on them; further

examination reveals the fact that he does not.

He takes stomach bitters, nerve tonics, sarsaparillas, and various stimulants. He indulges in hair tonic. He even washes himself with various soaps, and he tells others to “go and do likewise.” He takes the bitters and the tonics so that he will get up some inclination for the pills, but before he takes them he indulges in a little solid food. There are over thirty articles on the list, Ayer’s, Hood’s, Vin Mariani, etc., and they are all taken in the great and noble endeavor to keep his receptive interior up to the requisite.

What would the world do if Depew refused to take his regular morning course of appetizers so that he could wade through the exhausting course of the day’s eating? What would the world do, if he refused “Red Raven Splits,” that “leave no bad effect,” so that he could make room for the next morning appetizers? What would the world do were he to discontinue the trying brain work, the intense application of alternately gorging by force, and then disgorging by force? What, in a word, would the world do, were Depew to revert to the primitive stages of humanity where a man eats what he needs, instead of eating what he can force himself by the hydraulic and pneumatic pressure of a saline laxative, and a stomach irritant? Why, the world would eat itself into a comfortable feeling of pleasure that is so disastrous to civilization, instead of going hungry as it does at times.

But Depew does not spend all his time on eating. He also drinks. How many times we have stopped at a page to admire his sleek, smooth, butler-like face as it headed the announcement that his nerve has been improved by taking fourteen bottles of Paine’s Celery Compound, and that he is now able to sleep since he absorbed nine bottles of Dr. Greene’s Nervura! He finds their restful, soothing, bracing effects last long enough to enable him to get his pills again. Before he took them he was wasting away, he had become as pale as one of his own jokes, but after taking them he picked up wonderfully, and among the things that he picked up were several jokes that other people had been unmanly enough to tell many times before, which were entirely new to him. He feared that something was the matter with him, because people fell asleep when he talked, but thanks to the great discovery which he has the honor to recommend, he is now able to keep his audience awake by hiring a brass band.

Then in the lighter walks of life he has done good service. In the vicinity of THE PEOPLE office there is a large sign which recounts the beauties of a drink known as Benedictine. It is not good to put in the bottle of an infant, even though the bottle

is advanced enough to be graduated, but it is one of the toys wherewith men set the earth spinning. On the roof above there is a portrait done in oils, of the same Depew, only this time he is advising people to try a certain brand of cigars. Farther along the street there is a grocery store, and Depew is pictured at a banquet board earnestly exhorting his cheering listeners to try an imitation coffee-substitute. In the same grocery store he stands erect, dressed in the regulation evening costume, and he holds in his hands a box of anchovies, and these also he recommends.

We have never seen him advising people to try a “temperance” drink, or to indulge in ordinary food. He always has some strange, delicate thing, that workingmen are accustomed to provide for others. His pills, tonics, appetizers, cigars, cordials, etc., are evidently his mainstay in life. What a lucky man! He is so abstemious that he does not eat bread. He is so good that he leaves that to the “industrious poor” who sacrifice their sons’, mothers’, daughters’ lives in order that they may provide him with the few things that are necessary to his existence.

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