

DAILY PEOPLE

VOL. 10, NO. 130.

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 1909.

TWO CENTS.

EDITORIAL

CLERGYMEN FALLING OFF.

By DANIEL DE LEON

THE report, presented to the Archbishop of Canterbury by a committee appointed to investigate the alleged falling-off in the number of candidates for the Anglican priesthood, states substantially the same findings of similar reports, made in all countries, by all denominations. The falling-off is marked everywhere; everywhere the same problem confronts ecclesiastical bodies—the problem of filling vacancies and staffing.

Reports of this nature have suggested the question, Is religion declining? And a welcome theme has the question furnished for penny-a-liners in magazines and daily journals; and when they are through we are none any further than we were before.

If the investigating committees would extend their investigations so as to comprise, not numbers merely, but also caliber, their eyes might be opened to a purpose. Compared with days gone by, the clergy is to-day made up of men of third and fourth intellectual rank. The circumstance of the lower intellectuality whom the cloth now attracts goes far to explain the decline in the numbers attracted. The two facts point unerringly to radical changes that society is undergoing.

Intellect is naturally attracted to that field that furnishes it the widest scope, the fullest gratification, and the amplest nourishment. At a time when facts were few and fantasy proportionally strong the clerical profession was the center of attraction for the intellect. Bebel correctly remarks in *Woman Under Socialism* that, if Goethe had been born in the Middle Ages, he would have been a great Father of the Church. In later years, when the military art flourished, a country's intellect was found there. The great "military geniuses" have been not "butchers" merely. Hardly one but had intellectual powers of very different nature and left unmistakable marks thereof on the pages of history. The present is the age of

Science in all its manifold ramifications, including the political sciences, or statesmanship. For the identical reason that at one time the cloth, next the sabre was the attraction, and so on, now positive knowledge absorbs the world's intellect, accordingly its powers.

It is not the occupation that renders a man great. It is the man who exalts the occupation. As the two act and react upon each other, in the measure that pursuits attract brilliancy they become brilliant, and, in turn, exert greater fascination. When the intellect, which added luster to a pursuit, turns to other channels, the pursuit wanes in luster. It was so with the military, it is so to-day with the clerical profession; and in both these, as in all other instances, 'tis not a decline in the pursuit that renders it unattractive, it is the superior attractiveness of loftier and ever loftier pursuits that eclipse the less lofty.

The falling-off of clergymen denotes the encouraging historic fact that human progress has not stopped. What moves, and moves progressward, will surely—by the attraction that it exercises upon superior minds and, thereby, upon increasing numbers—be strong enough to grapple with, and powerful enough to solve the social problems that confront our Age.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official Web site of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
Uploaded December 2010

slpns@slp.org