

EDITORIAL

FATHER GASSONIANA.

By DANIEL DE LEON

VI.

ASIXTH general principle, set up by Father Thomas I. Gasson in his February 6, Boston, address, and tested by which principle Socialism was pronounced a menace to the Nation is embodied in the passage “unless the bond as matrimony is regarded as sacred . . . the nation will inevitably go to pieces.”

Leaving for a later occasion—when the concrete charges advanced by Father Gasson against concrete features of Socialism shall be treated—the handling of the question of marriage, and sticking, for the present to the inquiry of general principles, only the general principle embodied in the above passage will be here considered.

Remembering that Father Gasson is a member of the Roman Catholic organization, and speaks as such, when the Father advances the principle that the bond of matrimony is sacred we are justified to go “beyond the record,” beyond the passages of his address reported in quotation marks by the *Boston Post*. Considering, accordingly, that the Roman Catholic organization takes an emphatic stand, not against the looseness of divorce merely, but against divorce itself, Father Gasson’s principle concerning the “sacredness” of the marriage bond must mean the principle of the bond’s indissolubleness. Combining all this, it follows that the passage cited from Father Gasson’s address amounts—at least among other things—to saying: “Unless the bond of matrimony is regarded as indissoluble, the nation will inevitably go to pieces.”

The utterance places Father Gasson and his organization in a succession of lights unenviable.

Only quite recently, within a week after Father Gasson’s address, we were all reminded, on the occasion of the sale of Mark Twain’s library, that the bond of matrimony was not considered sacred, hence indissoluble, by foremost apostles of original Roman Catholicism. The reminder came forcibly owing to a marginal notation—“atrocious scoundrel”—inserted by Mark Twain on page 82 of Samuel Clarke’s *A Mirrour or Looking-Glass, Both for Saints, and Sinners*, at the margin of

the passage which reported St. Saturus as saying he was resolved to forsake his wife, children, home, etc., for the love of Christ. The incident recalled numberless other Saints who gave vent to and put into practise the principle of St. Saturus. It is not to be supposed that pillars of an organization, canonized pillars, at that, will misrepresent their Founder. He can not be supposed to inspire impious sentiments, nor can his love be supposed to be gainable by the impiousness implied in the act of snapping, of dissolving, a bond that is sacred. The principle of the “indissolubleness of the bond of matrimony” is, according to the history of Father Gasson’s own organization, far from being the sweeping principle which his words would make it out to be. Seeing, moreover, that “partial sacredness” is a contradiction in terms—a thing is either “sacred,” or it is not,—Father Gasson is at war with the annals of his own organization which make practical denial of the “sacredness” of the bond of matrimony.

Leaving Father Gasson to square himself with his own organization, his posture is still more infelicitous when looked at from another angle of view, an angle of view with which society is more deeply concerned. It is not as a theologic tenet that Father Gasson advances the general principle that the bond of matrimony is indissoluble, sacred, as he words it. He advances the tenet strictly as one sociologic. His application of the principle leaves no doubt on that point. He applies the principle to the stability of the terrestrial thing, a Nation. None can choose but go to pieces, he warns, which regards the bond of matrimony as dissoluble. If to regard as indissoluble the bond of matrimony is the elixir of life to a Nation, then the historic fact remains a mystery of so many Nations having gone down in the ages (history calls it Dark Ages) during which Father Gasson’s organization held undisputed sway, and his sociologic principle concerning the “sacredness of the bond of matrimony” was “the law of the land.” How account for the downfall of the Holy Roman Empire? How account for the present torn-to-pieces condition of that watchdog of Catholicity, the former Kingdom of Poland? Coming down to more modern days, how account for the downfall—from Scotland south to Italy, from Scandinavia across to France, and now Portugal also, closely to be followed by Spain,—of the one-time powerful Roman Catholic political scepters one-time seated in those countries? Despite the alleged elixir of a Nation’s life and stability—Father Gasson’s principle concerning the indissolubleness of the bond of matrimony—one after another these Roman Catholic “Nations” fell to pieces. There must be some serious flaw in Father Gasson’s sociology.

But there is still a third angle of view—an angle of view of keen interest to the overwhelming majority of the people of this Nation—looked at from which Father Gasson fares even worse.

It was as a conservative patriot, as the patriotic custodian of this Nation, it was as a buckler against the menace to this Nation of the alleged “Socialistic doctrine” regarding the non-sacredness, or dissolubleness, of the marriage bond that Father Gasson took the rostrum in Boston. To oppose, a threatened “evil” means that the Nation is yet free from the “evil.” Now, then, it so happens that a corner stone of this country’s institutions is the denial of the “sacredness,” that is, the sacramental nature of marriage. It is a national principle with this Nation that marriage is a “contract,” binding as such, hence the condemnation of adultery; but, as such, dissoluble, hence the provisions for divorce. Whether the principle be an evil or not is here beside the question. Fact is the principle—evil or good—is, since the Nation’s birth, imbedded in the Nation’s life as one of its institutions; and surely enough, the Nation is not yet Socialist. The alleged evil is, accordingly, if at all a menace, no menace from without. To fight such an evil as a “menace fraught in Socialism” very much partakes of the nature of shutting the barn after the horse has been stolen. Yet the buffoonery of such a polity is of secondary consideration only. Interesting as a stray light upon Father-Gassonism as may be the ridicule to which its posture drives it, there is a feature of the thing that is of vastly greater moment. It may be, we believe it is, patriotism that animates Father Gassonism. But that “patriotism” is one qualified with the Jesuit principle of “mental reservation.” It is a patriotism in behalf of another “patria,” in behalf of another sovereignty than that of the United States. The substitution of the Papal’s terrestrial and universal empire’s cardinal polity that matrimony is a “sacrament” for the United States cardinal polity that matrimony is a “contract” means the downfall of this Nation and the raising of another on its ruins. It means revolution, and revolution, though, as Socialism holds, may be eminently patriotic, is the badge of RADICALISM not of CONSERVATISM.

The flaws in the two aspects above considered of Father Gasson’s sixth general principle, serious though they are, are not a circumstance beside the flaw in this third aspect. Combined, the flaws dispose of the general principle as hollow, false—and misleading.

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