

EDITORIAL

THE “KNOWLEDGE” OF PHILANTHROPISTS.

By DANIEL DE LEON

IT is a significant circumstance that, although Congressman A. Mitchell Palmer of Pennsylvania has endeavored somewhat to take backwater in the matter of his estimate of \$4,000 a year being inadequate to support a family of five in proper style, and he now explains that by “proper style” he referred to “college educations and things like that,”—it is a significant circumstance that the ire that the estimate kindled in the breasts of the philanthropic reformers has not been cooled, or soothed, by Congressman Palmer’s modification of his words. On the contrary. The flames of the ire continue lambent, so lambent that a distinguished reformatory philanthropist, a lady, at that, Mrs. Julian Heath, the founder and president of the Housewives’ League, pronounces the Congressman’s estimate “Tommyrot.”

And lucky is the circumstance. It is affording another opportunity to take a close look at the philanthropic reformer.

For instance:—

Interviewed by the *Sun* of Sunday the 18th of the current month, Mrs. Heath gives \$1,057.41 as the exact figure, ascertained without any “guessing at it,” that it should cost a family of five, father, mother and three children to live comfortably. Whereas, in the same report, another distinguished reformatory philanthropist, Mrs. Martha Bensley Bruere, author of *Increasing Home Efficiency*, maintains that “1,200 a year is the lowest standard for decent family living.”

A discrepancy of 13 per cent. between the two estimates is puzzling, especially when Mrs. Heath informs the public that the figures which she gives “have been arrived at by those who have made a study of the problem,” whereas those who quote

Congressman Palmer’s figures “do not know anything about it.”

If one thereupon compares the detailed items the discrepancies become still more puzzling, and the conviction creeps upon one that it is charitable to think all these people who do “not guess but know” that they “do guess and do not know.” If otherwise, then they know and seek to impose upon others.

But the matter becomes puzzling in other directions.

There is the great economist and philanthropic worker Prof. Simon N. Patten of the University of Pennsylvania. His “knowledge” led him to observe that “a man who gets more than \$15 a week as a recompense for his labor is a debtor to society; he receives more from society than he creates.” He is now confronted with the figures of his fellow reformers and philanthropists, Mrs. Heath Mrs. Bruere among them. They claim that a family of five can live comfortably only on \$1,200, or with \$1,057. If what he says it true, and then, taking the two statements together, it would follow that to live comfortably a man with wife and three children would have to be the pensionary of society to the amount of either \$277, or \$420; with the choice, if he does not want to be the pensionary of society, of living upon an amount below “the lowest standard of decent family living.”

We shall leave our capitalist professors and their philanthropically reforming brethren and sisters to unravel among themselves the puzzle of fantastic minds—while we shall continue to hold that civilized life is and will remain impossible so long as society is so constructed as to afford an opportunity for professors and reformers and philanthropists to thrive upon society’s back, and to insult intelligence with their “knowledge.”

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