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EDITORIAL

ALL ABOUT POTASH.

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TO the unenlightened who wonder how it comes that corruption is so much more rampant in America than in Europe; to the innocents who hold up the greater probity that marks European politics, compared with America, as a thing that can be emulated in America; to the timid souls who fear the “ruthless hand” of our bourgeois; to the critics who find fault with Marx for dubbing the bourgeois “upstarts”; finally, also, to the trustful who deem the Socialist Labor Party too “austere”;—to all of these is recommended that they contemplate the recent clash between the Department of State at Washington and the Foreign Office at Berlin, which resulted in the sudden resignation of the American Ambassador, Dr. David Jayne Hill.

The affair has been before this alluded to in these columns. The German press now throws fuller light upon it.

American mercantile interests, centered in potash, and German mercantile interests, centered in the same merchandise, got into a conflict. As was natural, each tried to overreach the other. As was natural, each sought the support of its own Government. Finally, as was natural, the Government of each listened, whereupon a conference was arranged to take place in Berlin between the representatives of the two sets of Potashers.

So far the lines of Germany and of the United States ran parallel. From that point on they fell foul of each other. In the falling of foul the two types—upstart, hence coarse, hence bullying and braggart bourgeois, and high-bred, hence brave, hence self-possessed feudal gentleman—leaped forth, to the discomfiture of the upstart.

One Mack H. Davis, a commercial expert of the Bureau of Trade Relations, was sent to Berlin to attend the conference in the capacity of commercial authority. Mr.

Davis's credentials did not abrogate or conflict with the credentials of Ambassador Hill. Each had his own field, Commercial Expert Davis's evidently an inferior and subaltern one to Ambassador Hill's. The Commercial Expert thought differently, and probably with good reason.

Even Ministers Plenipotentiary emanating from Washington have been known to take private instruction from mercantile firms, and cash, besides. The case of the "Asphalt" Minister Loomis to Venezuela is still fresh on the public mind. One need not have been "there" to know that Commercial Expert Davis went to Berlin "primed" by Potash. The consequence was that the gentleman arrogated to himself ambassadorial authority, and plied it with brutality, hectoring the German Potashers and the German Government itself, and threatening a "tariff war" if they did not yield.

Seeing that, in a manner, the potash conference had come about under the auspices of the diplomatic Departments of the two countries, the German Foreign Office looked to Ambassador Hill to curb Mr. Davis and teach him manners. The Ambassador, tho' himself a bourgeois product, did not walk on all fours. His studies, culture and training imparted to him a superior posture. He did try to curb Davis. At the same time, being bourgeois, and the representative of a bourgeois Government, his curbing lacked the firmness that the occasion required. In view of this, and as the only way to eliminate Davis, the German Government decided that the potash dispute be thenceforth conducted by the potash traders themselves, and it withdrew the German diplomatic mantle, that, however loosely, had been thrown over the conference. Secretary Knox met the move by sending imperative instructions to the American Ambassador to insist upon the dispute being made the subject of diplomatic notes; the German Foreign Office as determinedly insisted the matter did not belong in the diplomatic field, and, in parliamentary language, pronounced American diplomacy "brusque."

The upshot was the downfall of Ambassador Hill—and the back-down of the Administration in Washington.

What happened was that the bluff was called, and our bourgeois Government remained exposed as a bully.

From such sources corruption is inseparable. The probity practised elsewhere is

not thinkable where such folks hold sway. Bravery need never be feared from such a camp, only the swagger of the bully, that is, the fellow who thinks he has to deal with a weaker than himself, and crawls the instant he discovers his error. Of course such conduct is the conduct of the upstart. Finally, in the history of the potash affair may be read the endorsement of the S.L.P.'s "austerity"—in an atmosphere, such as the wild-cat bourgeois breeds, a revolutionary movement can not practise a too strict adherence to decency, and honor, and purity.

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