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DIALOGUE

UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN. {178}

By DANIEL DE LEON

UNCLE SAM—Why do you look at me so reproachfully for?

BROTHER JONATHAN (looking sad and still more reproachfully)—Ask your own conscience, it must surely smite you.

U.S. (hilariously striking his breast)—No “smite” here! It is peaceful and happy, like that of the distinguished cherubs who polish up the golden harps of the angels in heaven.

B.J.—Look at your shoes!

U.S.—What’s the matter with them? Are there any flies on them? Don’t they shine bright?

B.J. (satirically)—They do shine bright.

U.S.—Man, what’s the matter with you? Out with it!

B.J.—I shall out with it. You know I am poor.

U.S.—I do; do you blame me?

B.J.—You know I need every penny I can get.

U.S.—I do; and so do I need every penny.

B.J.—You used to come to me regularly twice a week, and have me shine your boots. For three weeks you haven’t patronized me; and I notice that during that time your shoes looked as if they were shined six times a week instead of once.

U.S.—So they are.

B.J.—Is that right of you; to withdraw your custom from me and take it to someone else?



UNCLE SAM & BROTHER JONATHAN

U.S.—Oho! Now I catch on.

B.J.—I ask you is that right that you pay some other bootblack and give me the slip?

U.S.—Didn't you say you needed every penny you can get?

B.J.—That's just it.

U.S.—And won't you admit I need every penny I can save?

B.J.—Sure! I would not complain if your shoes remained unpolished, but you are getting more shines now than ever; so you are now spending more than ever.

U.S.—There's where you are off.

B.J.—Do you mean to tell me you don't have your shoes shined now more frequently than when you used to patronize me?

U.S.—I don't mean to tell you that. On the contrary, I told you I now get them shined 6 days in the week.

B.J.—That's fully 4 times more than when I used to shine them for you.

U.S.—Correct!

B.J.—Now, why this bantering? You need every penny you can save. That's true; go ahead and save. But if you now indulge in 6 shines a week to your 2 shines formerly, you now spend 3 times as much with the bootblacks as you spent with me. And that's wrong.

U.S.—If I spent more with others than I did with you, or even if I dropped you and spent as much with others as I did with you, you might have cause to complain. But I don't, and you have no one to blame but yourself for your stupidity.

B.J.—My stupidity? You now pay less for 6 shines than formerly you paid me for two?

U.S.—That's just it.

B.J.—You used to pay me a nickel for a shine, that was 10 cents a week, and you mean to tell me you now get 6 shines for less?

U.S.—Just so! Nothing is less than 10 cents. I now get, at a first-class shineist, as you must admit by the looks of these shoes, 6 shines for nothing.

B.J. (shocked)—For NOTHING!?!?!?

U.S. (cool as a cucumber)—For nothing.

B.J. looks amazed.

U.S.—Let me explain this thing to you.

B.J.—Do, if you please, I implore you.

U.S.—Do you remember the talk I had with you some time ago, showing you that the concentration of capital was inevitably throwing more and more men out of work and grinding down out of their independence more and more small, independent concerns, like yours, for instance?

B.J.—Yes.

U.S.—And I told you how this development was leading us to the point where the masses would be paupers, and a few would be lords?

B.J.—Yes, but that's nonsense!

U.S.—That's just what you said. And I was showing to you how the machine is displacing labor—

B.J.—But how is the machine going to displace me? There never can be a machine to shine shoes.

U.S.—That's just what you said. Now, then, the place where I bought these shoes keeps 6 bootblacks in its store, and if you buy shoes there you are requested to have free shins in the store, and you are entitled to all the shins you want. See? Have you been displaced by the machine or haven't you, eh?

B.J.—Free shins?!

U.S.—In the competition going on between capitalist and capitalist they undersell each other. A way of underselling is to give away something. The large shoe stores give away shins, in this way they take away the trade of smaller concerns, and also the trade of such cockroaches as you. As the process of concentration tends to reduce the wealth of most people, most people feel compelled to be very saving. That's my case. I now save in shine and am better shined. And people like you, who believe we Socialists talk nonsense, will have sense knocked into their heads only in proportion as they are made to suffer.

B.J.'s head drops.

U.S.—People like you keep themselves in poverty. That would be their own business. But by doing so you pull all of us down. And then such people as you have the cheek to blame us if, by reason of our poverty, we go where we can save money!

B.J.—Now I understand why I have lost so many customers!

U.S.—I hope you do now understand it. And I hope you will stop being the fool you have hitherto been of allowing the old party politicians to fill your head full of chaff; that you will join the Socialist Labor party; and that you will with the rest of us try to overthrow the system of capitalism that impoverishes all of us, and place the tools of production and the land in the people's hands.

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