

EDITORIAL

RICHARD CROKER AS AN OBJECT LESSON.

By DANIEL DE LEON

We may expect that **Richard Croker**, late in life, will be overtaken by his conscience, and that he will depart to his eternal reward full of years, and blessed by the unstinted praise of those who benefited by his remorse. In the meantime he pursues the even tenor of his way, and heaps up food for repentance. Men are accustomed to look upon the reform of a harlot as a most ludicrous spectacle, and always doubt the sincerity of the new and better life. Becky Sharp¹ got religion in her old age, but she did not get it while there was any hope of gain from her old pursuits. Becky Sharp is the eternal embodiment of middle class morality, and of the aspirations which make the middle class the most hypocritical, and the most bedraggled class the world has ever seen.

Richard Croker is a successful Becky Sharp. His little adventures in the chase for gain were discovered, but he had standing enough to fight off any and all investigations. He had force enough to repel all attempts to call him to account. He had energy enough to turn in his own favor all those things which, in another and weaker man, would have relentlessly



RICHARD CROKER (1841-1922)

pulled him into the gutter. He cares for nobody, not even for the Democratic party with which he joined for the purpose of advancing himself in the world. He uses it, and he is willing to be used. He uses it for himself. He is willing to be used when the use will accrue to himself. He is a man of power, a man of force, a man of intelligence higher than that possessed by most animals of his species. He is also a man without a grain of honor, or a single redeeming characteristic.

When he first went into politics he made his mark with his fist. He continued

¹ [The main character of the novel *Vanity Fair*, by British author William Makepeace Thackeray.

that course until he had subdued the subordinates with whom he was associated, and then he turned his attention to higher game. His fist still stood him in well, but his cunning was more than a match for men who were far better educated, and much more able in many ways. His course from then on has been progressive, and when he has been pitted against giants in intellect, and men whose standing has been great in the state and the nation, he won. Those victories were due, not to the fact that he could beat them in open conflict, not to the fact that he could meet them and play their game better than they could, but to the fact that his early training still was not forgotten, and he could reach down and rule the subordinates.

Croker is victorious because he can crush any of the minor men, because he is still king of the ward heelers, because his word is sufficient to sink all the smaller fry in Tammany, because he can still fight rough and tumble—physically and intellectually—with any man among the rank and file. He then turns that collective strength, that agglomeration of brute force and animal cunning, against anyone who may say him nay. He knows the value of organization, and he turns organization to his own profit.

He became a rich man through it. He is amassing more wealth through it. He turns the pennies of the fruit peddler, the dollars of the street walker, the rake-off of the gambling house, the checks of the illegitimate business, and the thousands of dollars from the questionable concerns into a mighty current that sweeps all before it. The well-springs of that flood lie in the pennies and the dollars. He makes everyone accessory, and he turns the whole Democratic party into a machine for extortion, for collection, and the collections find their way to his bank account.

Is Croker not a great man? He is great. He is a genius, and he is a type of American greatness and American genius as those two words are interpreted by the middle class. It may all be summed up in the phrase—Croker is a good business man. There is the business man who waits in his little eight by ten store and retails a cent's worth of candy, or five cents' worth of flour. There is the type that deals on a larger scale. There is also the one who supplies the former. Croker is great enough to combine all of them, and he is great, he is a power, and he is a leader because he is more exacting, he can be guilty of a more bare-faced extortion than any other man before the public. He is the embodiment of all the morality and all the wisdom of middle class customs and business methods.

When the Republicans protest against him, when they decry his horny-handed ways, his coarse-grained intellect, and when they try to belittle the work he has

done, they do him an injustice. He is bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh, life of their life. He can carry, because he is a greater man, to a greater extent all the schemes of the middle class, and he can master the detail of the business as few other men can master it. Instead of trying to discredit him they should worship him.

But still all his actions must count up on the wrong side of the ledger. This makes it more than probable that we shall see him in sack-cloth and ashes, bowing down for the purpose of making his peace with man and God. That has been the usual end of the lawbreaker's life. Even the harlot has wild dreams of the time when she shall lead a better life, but there is always in the dream the accompanying idea that she will have money enough to live on. So it is with Croker. He will repent, he will give money to churches and charitable institutions, and he will see that he acquires money enough now to do so, without depriving himself of sufficient to pass his days in comfort.

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

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