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EDITORIAL

ST. JOHN'S CHAPEL.

By DANIEL DE LEON

RARELY have sentimentalists portrayed themselves more completely as the combination of lampoonists and lamentationists, that Marx and Engels described them, than, from Richard Watson Gilder down or up, is being done by howlers against the decision of Trinity Church Corporation to remove St. John's Chapel from where it now stands, in the slums of Varick street, to a more polite region.

The Trinity "Church" Corporation is not, and never was what its name is meant to imply—a religious concern. It ever was and continues to be a political government of property-holders in ambush.

When the American Revolutionists were praying for George Washington the Trinity "Church" Corporation was praying for George III., and furnished money and men to harass the rear and flanks of the patriot army. Owing to the Trinity "Church" Corporation New York City was the last spot evacuated by the British. Such were the pre-revolution antecedents of the owners of St. John's Chapel.

The post-revolution record of the Trinity "Church" Corporation was in keeping with its previous record.

The bulk, at any rate the most valuable of the Trinity "Church" Corporation lands are stolen property—just that. Students of early New York history are familiar with the Anneke Jans litigation. Anneke was simply crowded out of territory belonging to her. She was hounded and persecuted, and, unable, through poverty, to keep up the theory of equity before the law, had to let go.

The Trinity Church Corporation thereupon became a land speculator, making fortunes for her "trustees" collectively, or bestowing fortunes upon some of them individually, the Astors, for instance. It was to these speculative ventures of this "religious" institution that St. John's Chapel owed its birth. In order to draw

population north of Wall and surrounding streets, the chapel was built. It was purely a real estate move, with as much religion to account for it as there is in a coyote. Hence the site then chosen, Varick street.

The move succeeded. The value of the land, from being worthless marshes, rose apace—and so did the ground rent that Trinity religiously pocketed—and used. How?

The ground which Trinity leased became soon a replica of London's Whitechapel. The houses were rookeries; the worst dives, grog-shops, and disorderly houses were the sources of fat revenues. The sanitary laws of the State were defied. Trinity's tenements became proverbial for their unspeakableness.

Nor is this all. Nine-tenths of the Trinity Church Corporation's real estate has long ago reverted to the State's School Fund. Through the connivance of State and Municipal officials Trinity escaped the penalty of its unlawfulness, and the State's School Fund is to-day deprived of property which at any time it may seize, and which would remove the excuse of lack of funds for the raising of the requisite schools that the city's increasing population demands.

From start to now—such is the civic record of the Trinity "Church" Corporation. No wonder it now decides to remove St. John's Chapel to "better surroundings"—no wonder, seeing that only lamentations and lampoons are thrown across its path, and never any attempt made to seize the brigand by the throat and make him disgorge—no wonder Trinity looks down upon the lamentationists and lampoonists with the cynic leer that played around the lips of Tweed when he asked: "What are you going to do about it?"

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

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