

EDITORIAL

THE SEAT OF COURAGE.

By DANIEL DE LEON

COUNT SECKENDORFF, the *Tribune* correspondent who accompanied James G. Blaine during a good part of his presidential campaign in 1884, corrects the current version that the Blaines have given of the celebrated Burchard incident.

Towards the end of the campaign of 1884, the Rev. Dr. Burchard, accompanied by a number of Protestant divines, addressed Mr. Blaine at the Fifth Avenue Hotel. In the course of his address Dr. Burchard stigmatized the Democratic party as “Rum, Romanism and Rebellion.”

Blaine never repudiated these words. His claim was he had not heard them. The Democratic party, however, used them with good effect.

Count Seckendorff states that to his positive knowledge Blaine, with his family and friends, considered what was to be done with the Burchard alliteration, and that he decided to ignore it. Count Seckendorff adds that this was to him an evidence that “Mr. Blaine, though great in many ways, at critical moments lacked courage.”

If Blaine’s conduct was a case of “lacking courage,” it is a prime illustration of a set of facts of prime importance to militants in a revolutionary movement—the seat of courage is not in the breast, it is in the head: courage is not a physical, it is a mental, an intellectual product: he who would be courageous must KNOW.

Blaine wanted to be President. The phrase “Rum, Romanism and Rebellion,” uttered on his behalf, endangered his chances—in a way. Blaine lacked the KNOWLEDGE requisite to grapple with the emergency that the phrase created. Should he repudiate the phrase manfully?—he feared it would alienate A.P.A. or Know-Nothing vote{s}. Should he approve the phrase?—he feared it would alienate Catholic vote{s}. He wanted both sets of votes, and being ignorant he did the

cowardly thing—shut his eyes.

Since the second election of Lincoln, the presidential campaign of 1884 was the first that called for valor. Interests within the capitalist ranks were re-aligning. The brave man of the hour was sure to ride the crest of the wave, and carry off the honors. Blaine craved the honors, but did not know. A posture that blinked at Know-Nothingism (a dead issue) yet coquetted with its opposite (no issue at all), and neither of which was remotely the line of cleavage between the then re-aligning forces—such a posture could not enlist enthusiasm, or support. It only could and did weaken admiration and confidence. If not the determining, it surely was a contributory factor in Blaine's defeat.

The bravest horseman, if ignorant of seamanship, will be a poltroon at the helm of ship in a storm. The most dauntless seaman, if ignorant of horsemanship, will cut a sorry figure on the hurricane deck of a Mexican broncho. It is KNOWLEDGE of his ground that makes each brave, and IGNORANCE of the ground that turns each into a coward.

The distracted Blaine clinging to the mane of a horse which he knew not to ride, or to spar of the storm-tossed ship which he knew not to steer, should warn the militant revolutionist that the spring from which to drink and drink deeply is, not the spring of sounding sentimentalism, but that of sound information. The former breeds cowards only; only the latter brings forth the brave.

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

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