

## SOUP HOUSES AND HARD TIMES.

At the Vine street Congregational church, Cincinnati, January 10, 1904, the pastor, Herbert S. Bigelow, discussed the return of hard times, taking for his text scenes in the local police court.

Hard times and free soup houses are with us again. Every day for months has brought us reports of factories closed and wages reduced. Despite the demagogue's assurance of continued prosperity, the depression which has been predicted is here. The ugly facts cannot be concealed even by the papers which have been preaching for so long that hard times is a Democratic malady.

Our daily papers are beginning to read like the history of ancient Rome. The hungry mob clamors for bread, and the political bosses vie with each other in their ostentatious charities. Here, for instance, is a news item:

Councilman Michael Mullen, of the Eighth ward, Wednesday morning established a free soup house at 435 East Front street. It was instantly crowded by poverty-stricken people with baskets, broken-spout coffee pots, bottles and tin cans to carry away solid provisions, soup and coffee.

The condition of the unemployed has become so desperate and thieving so epidemic that our machinery of justice, which is usually so relentless in the prosecution of little criminals, has broken down. In our police court we have had the remarkable spectacle of the callous sleuth of the law pleading for the accused and the judge, grown merciful, dismissing acknowledged thieves whose hunger drove them to crime.

Here is a scene in this court. A man is on the stand who was caught with stolen bread. The officer who arrested him is called as the prosecuting witness. He addresses the judge. But, behold, this Javert abandons his role of sleuth. He speaks as a man and a brother. Listen:

"Judge, there are nearly two hundred people down there who are starving. This man Jones is a working man and not a thief. He was going to share what he stole with the others. To prevent worse crimes, such as burglary, we must arrest these men. They are out from 3 o'clock in the morning for what they can find to eat. A loin of pork was stolen Monday morning and the grocer told us not to look for it. 'Lord knows they need it,' he told us. In the buildings at 318, 320 and 322 there are many who have not a cent and who have nothing to eat."

What is the judge's reply to this policeman's plea for mercy? The judge is not a preacher. Perhaps he is not a church member. He is a politician. He

is a member of the "gang." Possibly he is worse than many he sends to prison. But he is not without heart, and this is his verdict:

"The stealing of bread under such circumstances is no offense!"

Another prisoner is arraigned. This is Charles Stevens, a white man. The night before he had gone to the jail, said he was out of work and hungry and begged to be locked up. What crime has he committed? None. He is here to ask the judge for the privilege of being treated like a criminal. The judge says:

"You may go to jail, and when the sun begins to shine warm enough, go to the jailer and tell him you wish to be released. I will docket you as committed for \$50 and costs at your own request."

Later the judge addressed a body of city officials before whom he defended these strange decisions. "Why," said he, "nearly every morning at 1 and 2 o'clock policemen on their beats find the men picking potato peelings out of the ash barrels. Why, gentlemen, even I would not hesitate to fracture one of the ten commandments if placed in this position."

And now listen to the words of a preacher who visited the politician's soup house: "It is a sad picture. I have been studying this problem of human misery all my life, and am no nearer a solution than when I began. I presume as soon as they eat their bread and molasses they will be thoroughly contented and will not work again until they are hungry."

That is the preacher of it. In a comfortable study, he has been seeking for a solution all his life. And the ripe fruit of all this research is the hackneyed presumption that poverty must be due to laziness.

Blind leaders of the blind! They offer no solution which is not an insult either to God or man. Sometimes they say there is not enough to go around, that poverty is inevitable, and in that plea, they blaspheme the Creator. But if they save the reputation of the Deity it is but to malign his creatures.

I shall not charge the preachers with dishonesty. A more charitable view is that they have so long thought of themselves as the repositories of all wisdom that they cannot become as little children and enter that kingdom of truth whose gates welcome those who are willing to learn.

The fact is their gospel of free will and individual responsibility is but half the truth. Environment is one of the factors of destiny. These unfortunates have been hardest hit by a social order

which would seem to us a monstrous thing if our eyes were not blinded by custom. Why is there not always work in abundance for those who wish it? My Reverend Sir, drop your phrases about the fall of Adam and the blood of Jesus and tell me, why should there be, at any time, a lack of employment for men? Have you tried to answer that question? Do you really want an answer to it? I half believe you do not. I speak the words of Henry George. Already I see a supercilious curl on your lips. What do you say? "Crank!" "Panacea!" "Patent nostrum!" Those words are the shibboleths of ignorance.

Henry George answered the question. He showed that industry is half strangled by laws which confer private monopolies upon the few, and impoverish the many by artificial restriction of the natural opportunities of employment. Put the taxes where they belong, upon land values. Stop taxing men for doing things. Make it ruinous for speculators to hold land out of use. Will that bring the millenium? Will that secure to laziness a full stomach? No, but it will be the recognition of an economic law of gravitation. Learn the laws of nature. That is the beginning of wisdom. Obey them, that is the will of God. The programme of Henry George will do more than a thousand years of preaching to make impossible this shameful spectacle of able-bodied men starving for lack of work, in a country where boundless resources could well employ the labor of the world.

## MR. MULLIGAN ON IDEALS.

For The Public.

The wood fire was burning merrily in Flynn's big store, and through the wide open door, the red flames, whirling and leaping, kinoscoped their movements upon the thoughtful face of Mr. Mulligan as he sat, the central figure of the little group that nightly gathered in this commoner's general assembly, of which he, Mulligan, was, by common consent, both president and orator licentiate. Whether our philosopher caught a recondit similarity between the mounting flames and the soaring aspirations of the human soul, or whether it was Donovan's reference to Tom L. Johnson's recent campaign that suggested the topic of the evening, is an open question. Anyhow, Ideals was the theme, and Mr. Mulligan rose to the occasion.

"Gintlemin," said Mr. Mulligan, "O! play second fiddle to no mon in the matter av lyalty to the holgh principles for which Mистер Johnson is