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HENRY GEORGE.
The California Radical Discusses the Pastor of Plymouth Church.

Henry George has submitted to an interview with an interlocutor from the Brooklyn Union, who accosted him thus:

"Mr. Beecher says that workingmen are better off today than they were twenty-five or thirty years ago. What do you think of that?"

"I do not believe it," replied Mr. George. "The tramp was unknown twenty-five or thirty years ago, and now they are flooding the country. It is not necessary to go further than notorious facts like these."

"Mr. Beecher seems to think that the trouble with workingmen is that they lack thrift?"

"That is not the trouble. A man may be as industrious and economical as he pleases without any certainty of gaining a competence. But what is there in the nature of things that in this nineteenth century should compel men to stint and strain and deny themselves the gratification of their natural instincts and wants as the sole condition of decent existence? Nature is no niggard. The Creator who has placed us here has, in the powers of body and mind He has given us, and in the natural materials and forces He has placed at our service, provided for the most bountiful supply of all our wants. The powers of production today are far in advance of all the demands made upon them. If distribution was fair, the everyday laborer might enjoy, not merely all the necessities of life, but the luxuries as well. There is an absurdity in preaching thrift and economy as a social remedy for want to beings to whom the command of Nature and of her limitless forces have been given. And that this is no remedy may be seen in another way. One workman may get ahead of his fellows by being more pinching in his expenditures, but, if the general body of workingmen was to reduce their scale of living, it is certain that wages would correspondingly decrease. In the present state of things, if American workingmen were to consent to live as Chinamen, they would soon be working for Chinese wages."

"What do you think of Mr. Beecher's belief that it is a law of nature that the weak must go under and the strong prevail, and that the poverty and suffering are the result

of this law?"

"I think it is only the law of that part of nature that lies below man. There is something in man that revolts against the idea that might makes right. Social disease does not come from the interference of benevolence with the law of the survival of the fittest, but from the interference of creed with those perceptions of justice which his Creator has implanted in man. The monstrous inequalities in the distribution of wealth in civilized society today does not result from the fact that some men can produce more wealth than others, but from the fact that some men seize upon the products of others. Some thus become abnormally rich, while others become abnormally poor. In all our great fortunes there is an element of spoliation and robbery. How many men are there who can honestly earn a million dollars? And that there exists many fortunes, not merely of millions but of scores of millions, involves on the side, the failure of labor to get its fair reward. Mr. Beecher is right in thinking that the man who works best should get the largest reward, but it is not the best work, whether the hand or the head, that secures the largest reward in society of to-day. The men who grow richest are not those who use their brains for the purpose of producing more wealth, but those who use their brains to get into positions which enable them to appropriate the labor of others. Take the enormous incomes now drawn from the ownership of land. The ownership of land involves no productive power, physical or mental. It is a mere appropriation. The income which the land-owner gets does not represent anything that he has done to add to the wealth of the community, but merely a toll which he is enabled to levy upon the rest of the community by claiming, as his own property, those natural materials which existed before man was. In the natural progress of society the wages of the lowest physical laborer ought to steadily advance with the increase of productive power. Discovery and invention directly add to the power of labor, and should increase the rewards of the very lowest forms of labor. That they do not do so is simply because of the metropolitanization of natural elements that are indispensable to labor and to life."

"Mr. Beecher seems to think that the tendency of our Government is toward the paternal form, and the Socialistic idea is, I believe, as often expressed by Socialists themselves, that the Government should carry on private business, just the same as it carries on the Post Office. What do you think of those suggestions?"

"I do not believe in the paternal idea of government. I do not believe that government should ever attempt to do what can be done as well by individual enterprise. But the progress of society is — and evidently by virtue of the fundamental law— toward a

closer and closer interdependence; and to secure equal freedom to each, which is the true end of government, it has already become— and with the progress of civilization most, in greater degree, become necessary for society as a whole to take upon itself functions which, in a ruder state, may be left to individuals. The railway, for instance, has now taken the place, to a great extent, of the public highways, and to leave the railways in the absolute possession and management of individuals and corporations is to put in the hands of some individuals the power of oppressing and plundering others. Businesses that are, in their nature, monopolies, are in my opinion proper functions of government, the natural development of which is to pass from a mere organization for the preservation of order into that of a great co-operative society. The ideal of the Socialist is the Christian ideal, but neither the Socialist nor the Christian can bring about that state of things in which each should produce according to his powers, and each share according to his needs, save by his conforming to that law of natural justice which gives to each what he earns. 'Seek first the kingdom of Heaven and its righteousness and all these things shall be added onto you.'