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EDITORIAL

WATSON AS A NATURALIST.

By DANIEL DE LEON

“**C**OMPETITION is inseparable from private ownership, and private ownership is a law of Nature,” accordingly Socialism is artificial, so says Thomas E. Watson in this month’s installment of the series against Socialism which he has been publishing in his *Watson’s Jeffersonian Magazine*, and which, as fast as published, *The People* has been popping holes through.

First of all, what is meant by “private ownership” in the above passage? Is it meant to describe the tenure of ownership of the social share of the fruits of a man’s labor? If so, whether “private ownership” be a “law of Nature” or not, it certainly is the law that Socialism will see to substitutes the present law. The present law enables the non-producing class to seize and enjoy the bulk of what would be the social share of the fruits of Labor’s toil: under the present law there is, accordingly, no private ownership: what there is is private plunder. The why of the wherefore leads to the next query.

Does “private ownership,” in the sentence quoted, mean the individual tenure of ownership of the necessaries for production? If it means that, then, again, whether the law be called a “law of Nature,” or not, it certainly is a law that Socialism will see to is torn up, root-and-branch. The private ownership of the necessaries for production implies a class that owns these necessaries and a class that is stripped of them. He who is stripped of the necessaries for production is the slave of him who holds the same. Without diving into the question whether Nature so wills it or not, Socialism plants itself squarely upon the principle that a state of things, whether dubbed “law of Nature,” or not, which decrees servitude for some and masterhood for others, is one that can not endure.

The full sentence may now be considered in its several possibilities of meaning.

Substituting the several meanings for “private ownership,” one gets either—

“Competition is the inseparable form of a tenure of ownership whereby the social share of the fruits of man’s labor is granted to him”—which is nonsense. Not competition, but emulation will prevail in such a social system. Competition implies a devil-take-the-hindmost rush for life. Such a rush, inevitable when the social system is such that the worker’s social share of his efforts may be “lawfully” plundered from him, vanishes as inevitably when society casts off the jungle conditions of existence: then rises the lofty aspiration of emulation;—or,

“Competition is inseparable from the individual tenure of ownership of the necessaries for production”—which is true. By the fruit of such a tenure of ownership, Competition, the nature of the tenure may be judged. By that token the thing stands condemned.

The jungle with its wild beast tenantry is “natural.” Equally “natural” is the cutting down of the jungle, the extirpation of the wild beasts, and the establishment of peaceful society. Mr. Watson, as a naturalist, is as lopsided a being as he is in his capacity of economist. The gentleman knows of Nature only its primitive state. He never fathomed the fact that

In that art, that you say makes Nature,
Is an art that Nature makes.¹

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¹ [William Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*.—Editor.]