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4 August 1888

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Does Competition Mean War?

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To the Editor of Liberty:

Your thought-provoking controversy with Herr Most suggests this question: Whether is Individualism or Communism more consistent with a society resting upon credit and mutual confidence, or, to put it another way, whether is competition or co-operation the truest expression of that mutual trust and fraternal good-will which alone can replace present forms of authority, usages and customs as the social bond of union?

The answer seems obvious enough. Competition, if it means anything at all, means war, and, so far from tending to enhance the growth of mutual confidence, must generate division and hostility among men. If egoistic liberty demands competition as its necessary corollary, every man becomes a social Ishmael. The state of veiled warfare thus implied where underhand cunning takes the place of open force is doubtless not without its attractions to many minds, but to propose mutual confidence as its regulative principle has all the appearance of making a declaration of war in terms of peace. No, surely credit and mutual confidence, with everything thereby implied, rightly belong to

an order of things where unity and good-fellowship characterize all human relations, and would flourish best where co-operation finds its complete expression,— viz., in Communism.

W. T. Horn.

The supposition that competition means war rests upon old notions and false phrases that have been long current, but are rapidly passing into the limbo of exploded fallacies. Competition means war only when it is in some way restricted, either in scope or intensity,— that is, when it is not perfectly free competition; for then its benefits are won by one class at the expense of another, instead of by all at the expense of nature's forces. When universal and unrestricted, competition means the most perfect peace and the truest co-operation; for then it becomes simply a test of forces resulting in their most advantageous utilization. As soon as the demand for labor begins to exceed the supply, making it an easy matter for every one to get work at wages equal to his product, it is for the interest of all (including his immediate competitors) that the best man should win; which is another way of saying that, where freedom prevails, competition and co-operation are identical. For further proof and elaboration of this proposition I refer Mr. Horn to Andrews's Science of Society and Fowler's pamphlets on "Coöperation". The real problem, then, is to make the demand for labor greater than the supply, and this can only be done through competition in the supply of money or use of credit. This is abundantly shown in Greene's "Mutual Banking" and the financial writings of Proudhon and Spooner. My correspondent seems filled with the sentiment of good-fellowship, but ignorant of the science thereof, and even of the fact that there is such a science. He will find this science expounded in the works already named. If, after studying and mastering these, he still should have any doubts, Liberty will then try to set them at rest.