

"The Profit of The Earth"

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A wave of anti-clericalism, not to call it anti-religion, is sweeping over the world. It's no new thing, for it has been observed by discerning eyes for half a century or more. It has merely become more blatant and obvious in recent years. It is likely to grow worse rather than better. Whether it be true, as ex-President Hoover believes, that Communism is weakening before the forces of Fascism, or otherwise, the communistic belief that "religion is the opiate of the human mind" is certainly growing in strength.

This communistic belief is a challenge to the religions of the world. It suggests the question of how far organized and institutionalized religion is responsible for the increasing disbelief in religion as an agency for human betterment. Can the churches meet the challenge? It must be admitted to date they have not done so. As in former times, institutionalized religion has settled itself comfortably in formal creeds and rituals which give joy to its devotees and do not to any noticeable degree incite them to rectify the glaring wrongs and festering conditions which our so-called civilization seems to breed spontaneously.

If what is called religion be the genuine article, the declaration that it is the opiate of the human mind would seem to be amply proved. It was this thought that prompted Wendell Phillips, a deeply religious man as well as a leader in the cause of the abolition of chattel slavery, to declare himself to be "an infidel to a church that can rest at peace in the presence of this great wrong." It was this thought that made the Hebrew prophets whose words have come down to us rebels against the institutionalized religion of their day. Even the Founder of Christianity was a rebel against the travesty of religion that was offered the people of His day by the scribes and Pharisees of high and

low degree. How like the denunciations of religion by the Socialists and Communists of today reads His discourse set forth in the twenty-third chapter of St. Mathew! Small wonder that He met the fate meted out to the prophets who had preceeded Him!

But as we read the words of the Carpenter of Nazareth and compare them with the teaching of the churches today we are struck by a mighty change that has come over those who presume to teach in His name. It is not merely the change that might be expected from changed conditions. It is a change in spirit and substance. It is a change that comes from total and complete failures to comprehend His spirit and His aims, a failure as complete as that of the High Priest Caiphas, who saw in Him indeed an agitator bent on turning the world upside down but could not see that the world urgently needed to be turned right side up.

Consider one phrase in that prayer of prayers which He taught us: "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." How many so-called Christians mouth that phrase without a thought of its implications, never drawing of the obligation it imposes on us to ascertain God's will and do it!

The laws of Moses have both an individual and a social or economic significance Jesus did not, as so many believe, repeal them. Instead, He strongly and specifically endorsed them in His Sermon on the Mount, saying:

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets. I come not to destroy but to fulfill. Verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled." (Matt. V, 17-18)

Those parts of the law designed for the governance of individuals in

their relations to one another have been preserved and form a part of the religious teachings of the churches today. Those parts of the law designed for the governance of the state or nation in its relations to its people, and of the people in their relation to the state, have for the most part been discarded.

Neither Israel nor Christendom have ever regarded or obeyed, in spirit or in letter, the land law promulgated by Moses in the twenty fifth chapter of Leviticus. This law forbade the sale of land in perpetuity and provided for a practical redivision of the land in the year of jubilee, which was to be every fifty years. This law, promulgated in a primitive pastoral and agricultural civilization, could have had no other design than to provide that there should grow up in Israel no landless proletariat with no right to a place to live, to work, to earn an honest living. Obedience to it was to be rewarded by security, prosperity, happiness and length of days. Disobedience was to bring national disaster. The history of Israel and of the world in general is a testimony of the continued ignoring and disobedience of the law.

There is one bright exception to this disheartening history. The youthful Solomon, we are told, prayed for wisdom to govern his people, and received it abundantly. He revived the law, which had become a dead letter. He raised Israel to unprecedented prosperity and grandeur. Little is said specifically of how he did it, but a clause in Ecclesiastes gives us a hint:

"The profit of the earth is for all; the king is served by the field."

The "profit of the earth," clearly, is the rent thereof. The king was the state. Solomon would appear to have collected the revenues of the kingdom from the rent of the land, thus killing at one blow the double bleeding of the people by landlordism on the one hand and the robbery of the industry and trade of the people by misplaced taxes on the other. Thus there is no mystery in the prosperity that came in an earlier period of his



reign, nor in the kingdom's relapse into its former state when in his dotage he forgot the law. At his passage the nation wellnigh destroyed itself in the civil wars of rival interests that followed.

In later years Isaiah (fifth chapter) lifted up his voice to tell Israel in general and Judah in particular the reason for their sad plight. In beautiful Eastern imagery He told them what God had done for Israel, what He expected from Israel, and what He got:

"And He looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry. Woe unto them that join house to house and lay field to field till there be no place, that they may be alone in the midst of the earth!"

Could condemnation of the monopolizing of the land be more strongly or plainly phrased?

Later, in his 65th chapter, he gives us a glimpse of the civilization that will result from obedience to the law:

"They shall build houses, and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them, They shall not build and another in-

habit; they shall not plant and another eat; they shall not labor in vain nor bring forth for trouble."

The concluding verses of the fifth chapter of Jeremiah, that irrepres-sible denouncer of the nation's sins and predictor of the evil results thereof, are worthy of the prayerful considerer of every so-called interpreter of the will of God and preacher of His word today:

"A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so. And what will ye do in the end thereof?"

Is not that an accurate picture of the world today?

Is it innate cussedness or ignorance that makes men and nations act as they do? I have no hesitation in asserting my belief that it is ignorance—that ignorance is in reality our "original sin." We are all born totally ignorant, knowing nothing whatever, and few indeed are they who emerge far from that condition. And they who presume to have learned and to teach the social as

well as the individual law of God have not learned it well. They follow too well the injunction of the Israelitish King who demanded, "Prophecy unto me smooth things," as he got rid of a troublesome prophet who told him the rough truth.

Is religion, then, "an opiate of the human mind?" I do not, I cannot, believe it. True religion is an inspiration, a developer, an ennobler of the human mind. But this cannot be said of the superstitions which have so clustered themselves about religion as to obscure and conceal it, so that it may be said that Churchianity has usurped the place of Christianity.

It is Churchianity, not Christianity, that is the opiate of the human mind.

If any one who reads this article detects in it a flavor of the philosophy of Henry George, I can only say that the philosophy of Henry George is based on the law and the prophets, aided and developed by the social truth discovered and applied by the King whose name has become a synonym for wisdom:

"The profit of the earth is for all."