

Raising Hell on Earth

By STEPHEN BELL*

"AND He looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry."

"Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may dwell alone in the midst of the earth."

"Therefore my people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge; and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst."

"Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth beyond measure; and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it."—(ISA. v, 7-8, 13-14.)

"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?"—(JER. V, 31.)

If there ever was a period in human history when the prophets or teachers and leaders of the people were more busily engaged in prophesying falsely and inculcating erroneous beliefs in the minds of the people than now, I never heard of it. House has been joined to house and field to field until there is no place where men may live, work and earn an honest livelihood, our people are gone into the captivity of helplessness because they lack knowledge, hell hath enlarged herself beyond measure, and the glory, multitude and pomp of men are descending into it.

So far as learning the why and wherefore of all this, the Nazarene seems to have touched their blind spot when He said:

"They have Moses, and the prophets, and if they believe not them, they will not believe one though he return from the dead."

Consider the beauty and exceeding richness of the earth, the dwelling place, storehouse and workshop in which we are placed! What a wondrous garden of beauty, prosperity and happiness it could be made by the friendly cooperation of men and nations! And consider the shambles we have made and are making of it! Why do we do it? Can there be any truer answer to the question than the one given by Isaiah, that we know no better?

There are those who, holding to the doctrine of "original sin," insist that it is the innate cussedness in man that makes him behave as he does. Even so, what is that "original sin" other than the total ignorance in which all of us are born and from which so few of us emerge very far? It is my belief that little children were the favorites of the Nazarene because of their teachability rather than their innocence. Unfortunately that is a quality which too many of us, in our educational system, outgrow too early in life, with the result that we learn little of real value afterward. From this fact has arisen the saying, "You can't change human nature." That

is true, but it is equally true that human intelligence can be cultivated and developed.

Why are we not making the earth the garden it ought to be, the home of countless millions of prosperous and happy families thanking God for life and its blessings?

To cut a long story short, it is because we have discarded the Mosaic conception of the earth as "the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (all of us) for the pagan Roman conception that it is the private and personal property of a master class. They have discarded the wisdom of Solomon, who declared "the profit of the earth is for all" for the Roman idea that its rent belongs to its masters and owners.

The result of this misconception of land and its rent as private property rather than a communal trust is the misplacement of the burden of the public revenue. Society, instead of collecting its own, the rent value of land which only civilized society creates, levies on the private earnings of its individual members by taxing almost to death their economic activities, the products and processes of their industry and trade.

This misplacement of the burden of the public revenue has unbalanced the economy of the nation and the world and wrought immeasurable mischief. It has held out the promise of profit for the joining of house to house and laying of field to field for speculation until it is literally true that there is no place for men to live, work and earn a livelihood except by the permission of the masters who hire them. It robs labor and productive capital of their legitimate earnings until they cannot buy the products of their labor and the public buying power, the effective demand on which industry and trade depend, has largely evaporated. It is estimated and no one denies it, that, the costs and prices of the things comprising our standard of living are enhanced 25 per cent or more by the taxes, largely hidden, which are levied on them in the various stages of production and distribution. If these taxes were abolished, the things which now cost a dollar could be bought for 75 cents, leaving 25 cents for the purchase of more of the things we need and want. What this added demand for goods would do for unemployment can be better imagined than described. What the added demand of those now disemployed would do passes beyond the imagination.

Socialists and other "social planners" tell us the maldistribution of the national wealth and income requires the intervention and regulation of government. That is to say of the personnel, the politicians, who are the tangible representatives of our government. This is of the "wisdom of man which is foolishness unto God." Would it not be more sensible to try first the natural freedom with which God has endowed us, and for which Lincoln aspired at Gettysburg—

"That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom"—the freedom to earn an honest living, of which a larcenous system of taxation has deprived us?

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