

ETHICS OF THE SINGLE TAX.

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I. THE DUTY OF CHRISTIANS.

THE great merit of the single tax is its adaptability. Indeed, it would be difficult to conceive of a religious or social propaganda which does not need to include its essential doctrine. Especially should all Christian associations, taking their name from the great religious and social reformer of Judea, feel interested in the ethical side of the single tax, which embodies the essence of Christianity. It will bear to be measured by the golden rule. Land monopoly is a distinct violation of the injunction, "Do unto others as you would that others should do unto you." For a comparatively few people to appropriate and control that which is the bounty of the Creator to all, is subversive of Christianity, and is the underlying cause of social confusion. Yet today such an assertion is popularly held to be a mere abstraction, or "glittering generality."

How can we reconcile the fact that with all the church and philanthropic organizations of the land, the evils to be abated grow faster than the engine of reform, and that sincere workers in the field of human amelioration, lament that the tide of vice and misery is a rising and not an ebbing one?

To talk with any earnest laborer among the poor, hoping for tidings of fundamental improvement is to court disappointment. That is, when the work is viewed in the aggregate. Here and there are cheering examples of individual salvation, of brands plucked from the burning; but who ventures to assert that the destructive fires are lessened by all our expensive efforts? Over this state of things it is common to express astonishment. The inadequate success of such labor expended assumes the form of mystery, but when anything is mysterious there is always the prescriptive right to assume that it is of the Lord's ordaining. On the pages of history, how many evils that puzzled the time were attributed to divine purpose, and afterwards proved to be merely the results of human ignorance or greed!

The advocates of the single tax believe that the true cause of the social wrongs, so generally considered inscrutable, is the unjust misappropriation of land, or natural

opportunity, which is the comprehensive term. Nor is this conviction peculiar to the followers of Henry George. It has been forced upon human consciousness since the days of the Bible, as is demonstrated by scripture texts and the expression of writers through the centuries since literature began. But the remedy had not been perceived before the publication of "Progress and Poverty," in which it was made plain. Our mission is to urge the trial of that remedy, and to persuade the people that justice is the greatest solvent in the world; that the power to perpetuate practical slavery, which the control of land confers upon the landlord, has in it no element of justice or equity.

One of the important functions of a Christian association is to procure employment for industrious men who seek work. It is a common reply, when the over-crowded avenues of industry, from sheer congestion, shut out many industrious and honest laborers, that "any one who really wishes to work and deserves to find it, need not be idle." Nothing is farther from the fact, as any one who attempts to find a situation for worthy applicants knows from experience. Even now, in Boston, men accomplished in their vocation as bank employees, through long years of faithful service, are filled with anxiety at the prospect of enforced idleness which is to come with the speedy extinction of nine national banks. Under existing conditions the mere thought of losing employment everywhere haunts men and women whose daily labor is their daily bread.

Why should this be possible? In a country and a world with excess of opportunity, with more work than workers, why should the reverse seem the fact? It is this fear of want that generates greed and competition of a cruel species.

We are trying to make the reason plain, and to show that the unholy divorce of labor and laborers is a man-made and curable infliction.

There is nothing of the divine in it, and when the fact is clear, the efficiency of all religious organizations will be multiplied a thousand-fold. We affirm that such a state of things is unreasonable and monstrous, possible only for the reason that the laws have been made, as all statutes that oppress are made, at the dictation of men who profit by them. Not enacted so much with the intention of injuring others as of profiting the lawmakers. In this way systems of wrong are rooted, and around them existing customs and interests grow and cling. When they become intolerable their overthrow through force and bloodshed entails a further curse. Such is the lesson of history.

The calmest and most optimistic observer who faces unflinchingly the problems which threaten society today, cannot fail to be impressed with the dangers impending, if current tendencies are unchecked. Unrest is universal, and the men who once toiled

unthinkingly and without hope, are stirred with new impulses bred of increased general intelligence and extended suffrage. The masses are thinking, and, with thought, feeling becomes more acute. Wrongs discerned are not long borne with stolid indifference.

In the words of Henry George:

"Between democratic ideas and the aristocratic adjustments of society there is an irreconcilable conflict. . . . We cannot go on permitting men to vote, and forcing them to tramp. We cannot go on educating boys and girls in our public schools, and then denying the inalienable right to the bounty of the Creator. Even now, in old bottles the new wine begins to ferment, and elemental forces gather for the strife."

And the great leader who a year ago laid down his life in unselfish conflict, sounded ever the note of hope above the note of discouragement. After the warning came always the word of cheer, and how many hearts have been uplifted by this assurance:

"But if, while there is yet time, we turn to Justice and obey her, if we trust Liberty and follow her, the dangers which now threaten must disappear, the forces that now menace will turn to agencies of elevation."

With what eloquence he depicted the possibilities of the race under the conditions possible to civilization, looking to "the Golden Age of which poets have sung and high-raised seers have told in metaphor." Of these things Christians, singly or in associations, must concern themselves, if the spirit as well as the name of the Master is to be regarded.

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