

Rev. John W. Kramer — Rt. Rev. Thomas Nulty.

Brief Reviews of Their Life Work in Land Reform.

BY HENRY GEORGE, JR.

In the death of Rev. John W. Kramer, rector of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit, Bath Beach, Greater New York, and of Rt. Rev. Thomas Nulty, Bishop of Meath, Ireland, the world's movement for the assertion of common rights to the soil loses two of its strongest champions.

Early on the morning of December 22, 1898, Dr. Kramer woke his family and said that he thought that his hour had come; that his mind was at peace, and his work done, save that there was just one



REV. JOHN W. KRAMER.

word to add to the Christmas sermon which he had all but finished—and that word was “trustful.” A few hours later Dr. Kramer, succumbing to a protracted heart trouble, followed his wife, who had gone in the year preceding, and sank into the long sleep.

The word that he gave to his daughter, Julia, to be added to his sermon when he should have passed was of all words that which best explained his own character. A man of clear mind and strong principles, and of firm courage to follow wherever his conscience led, he trusted Truth, and did not for a moment waver in the belief that communities as well as men have but to follow straight after her to come to that high plain of civilization of

peace and plenty, of which the great and wise in all ages have dreamed. He was a firm believer in the rule of Providence through the medium of justice; and that as men sow, so shall they reap; and he proclaimed his convictions without counting costs.

Born in Baltimore, January 5, 1832, he received an academic education, and in 1850 married Julia Ann Jackson, of Baltimore. He studied medicine; and graduating, practiced two years. But his thoughts had now turned to the church, and he commenced study for the ministry. Then came the Civil War, and he entered the conflict as chaplain of the First Maryland Regiment. In 1865 he was ordained as minister in the Protestant Episcopal Church, and became rector of Calvary Church, Summit, N. J. He removed to New York City in 1870, and during twenty years' residence there, was rector of the Church of St. John the Evangelist and Church of the Holy Faith, and in 1890 became rector of the Church of the Holy Spirit, at Bath Beach. He was identified with all the larger New York charities—State Charities Aid, Charity Organization Society, and Sanitary Reform Society. He was master of St. John's Guild from 1875 to 1885, and gave personal supervision to the excursions of the floating hospital of the guild. He was one of the founders of the Church Association in the Interests of Labor, and had extensive experience in visiting the poor, publishing a “Manual for Visitors of the Poor.” He was, moreover, author of several religious works, among them “Religion,” “The Right Road” (published in New York and London), and “Comfortable Thoughts for Those Bereaved.” At the time of his death Dr. Kramer was general secretary for the Church Congress in the United States.

It was when Henry George spoke before the Church Congress at Detroit in the early eighties that Dr. Kramer and he became acquainted. My father spoke on the question of labor, showing that the labor question was in fact the moral question, and that all teachers of morals must take an interest in the economic question. In this address he set forth those doctrines which in after years became embodied in the term “Single Tax.” The address excited vigorous discussion, especially that part of it devoted to the remedy, many of those considering the matter for the first time regarding as something like a proposal of theft the proposition that the common rights to land be observed without compensation to existing land owners.

But Dr. Kramer was not one of these objectors. The present system of private property in land was to his thought wrong, and he saw no way of compromising with it. He accepted without qualification the single tax proposal to absorb the whole value of land—that is, economic rent—through the medium of taxation.

Soon he put his principles to the test. My father was nominated by the organized workingmen of New York for the office of Mayor in 1886. Dr. Kramer presided over the meeting of general citizens in Chickering Hall called to endorse the action of the workingmen in nominating Henry George. Rev. R. Heber Newton, Prof. Thomas Davidson and Rev. Dr. McGlynn were among the speakers, and,

indeed, this was the meeting that led to Dr. McGlynn's excommunication soon after. Resolutions were passed, and the chairman was requested to report at the ratification meeting to be held in Cooper Union, and in his speech at this latter meeting Dr. Kramer said among other things:

“We mean to say to men who have put their speculative hands upon the necessities of life, ‘Hands off of our land, of our food, and of our fuel!’ Nothing will be destroyed that is of real value. Trains will come to our city and steamers cleave the waters of our bay, and men go to and fro over our streets. Fictitious values may tumble, but real values will have a more permanent and lasting foundation than they have ever had before.”

The campaign brought defeat at the polls, but victory for all whose chief idea in entering it was to introduce real principles—principles of the highest order—into public thought and general politics, and Dr. Kramer with the other leaders in that memorable fight regarded it as an epoch in American history. And the general student of history must so regard it, if not on account of the introduction of the single tax idea, at least because it was then for the first time that a political party declared for the introduction of the Australian ballot system, Henry George himself writing the platform on which he stood.

To his single tax faith Dr. Kramer ever remained faithful. His friend, Dr. McGlynn, was excommunicated, and he himself suffered that quiet neglect that to the sensitive man is perhaps harder to bear than open conflict; but he followed the cross of the new crusade to the end. He was not in a position to take active part in the Mayoralty fight of 1897, but his

heart was in it, and when his friend Henry George fell, he, fresh from the loss of his marriage companion, came to Fort Hamilton and took part in the private funeral service.

When after generations shall come to trace the history of the great movement for equal rights in land in this country, Dr. John W. Kramer's name will appear among those at the front.

Two days after Dr. Kramer ceased to breathe, and in the eighty-second year of his life, died Thomas Nulty, Bishop of Meath, Ireland, who in 1881 issued a pronunciamento that rang around the world and gave a new aspect and a fresh life to the land agitation that was in active progress in Ireland. In a long letter addressed to the clergy and laity of the diocese of Meath, Dr. Nulty laid down the principle of common rights to land in the most unequivocal terms, the most striking paragraphs being:

"The land of every country is the gift of its Creator to the people of that country; it is the patrimony and inheritance bequeathed to them by their common Father.

out of which they can, by continuous labor and toil, provide themselves with everything they require for their maintenance and support, for their material comfort and enjoyment. God was perfectly free in the act by which He created us; but, having created us, He bound Himself by that act to provide us with the means *necessary* for our subsistence. The land is the only means now known to us.

"The land, therefore, of every country is the common property of the people of that country, because its real owner, the Creator who made it, has transferred it as a voluntary gift to them. *'Terram autem dedit filiis hominum.'* Now, as every individual in that country is a creature and child of God, and as all His creatures are equal in His sight, any settlement of the land of a country that would exclude the humblest man in that country from his share in the common inheritance would be not only an injustice and a wrong to that man, but, moreover, would be an impious resistance to the benevolent intentions of the Creator.

"I infer, therefore, that no individual or class of individuals, can hold a right of private property in the land of a country; that the people of that country, in their public corporate capacity are, and always must be, the real owners of the land of their country—holding an indisputable title to it, in the fact that they receive it

as a free gift from its Creator, and as a necessary means of preserving and enjoying the life He has bestowed upon them."

This extract from the Bishop's pastoral letter was printed with a fac simile of his signature attached to it and posted up all over Ireland. My father was in that country at the time, and in one of his letters to the "Irish World" here in New York he described the effect of the thing.

"The horror and indignation which it has excited among landlords and magistrates and policemen have given it the full benefit of the circulation of all the Irish government papers and all the English press. It was telegraphed in full by all the news associations as a manifesto which was being distributed by the priests of Ireland, and thus has a ray of light been spread into dark places it would otherwise hardly have reached. And the good Bishop has waked up to find himself more than famous. He is denounced as a Communist of the worst kind, and as teaching a doctrine infinitely more dangerous than the No-Rent Manifesto, for as one of the London papers (the 'Standard,' if I remember rightly) declares: 'This is not a mere call to do a certain thing for a certain time like the No-Rent Manifesto; it is a declaration of principle that sinks into the mind and becomes a permanent conviction.'

Not many months after this the movement was side-tracked, and the Land League killed by Parnell and his Parliamentary colleagues, who, to get out of jail, into which they had been cast in consequence of the social struggle and to gain their small political ends, compromised with the Gladstone Government. Bishop Nulty's pastoral letter ceased to have any effect upon active affairs, but the real cause of thought "went marching on," and has marched on ever since; so that the very doctrines for which he was denounced as a "Communist" by the Liberal party organs are now urged upon the Liberal leaders in Great Britain by large and active numbers in the party as embodying one of the few proposals potent and necessary to put the Liberals in political power again. In an article in the January number of the "Fortnightly Review," one of the greatest of the British periodicals, appears an article entitled "Recreant Leaders," and signed "By the Author of 'Life in Our Villages.'" The article is long, but a couple of paragraphs will suffice to show its nature. After stating that "the fundamental principle of Liberalism may be said to be the promotion of whatever will conduce to the

general good—the welfare of the whole people," the writer states that there are two applications of this principle.

"One of these—and the only one I propose to deal with now—is the land question. At no very distant date that will have to be taken up, and on the broad Liberal principle of the common good—the whole land for the whole people; for the whole people first, and for the actual possessors of it only in so far as it may be consistent with the good of the whole. The competent man who shall take his stand on that in a downright earnest and resolute spirit will be the leader and inspirer of the Liberal party. I do not say that now is the time to do it. I grant that it may very reasonably be doubted whether it would be wise to attempt to push this question to the front at this particular time, when circumstances have combined to obscure its importance somewhat. It may be that it would be prudent to wait a little on events, even though to do so may condemn the party to comparative stagnation for a while. I will not say that it should be taken up at once. It would very much depend upon who takes it up. But in any case the question is certain to press itself to the front before long. We shall be certain to have again a period of industrial depression and commercial difficulty; and then a general turning to the land and to thoughts of the public wealth and individual comfort which it might so easily afford will be a perfectly natural and inevitable outcome of the time, and the leading statesman—whether Sir William Harcourt, or Lord Rosebery, or anybody else—who shall be prepared for it will open the new era for the Liberal party. He will find that the opposition of personal interests will be futile, that sectional differences will vanish, and that he will lead both with

credit to himself and advantage to the country. Until that time comes, soon or late, I doubt whether any great resuscitation of the party is to be looked for.

"All thinkers who approach this subject from an independent standpoint and with an unbiased mind are agreed that the system of private ownership is neither philosophically sound nor historically justifiable, and that by some means or other the ownership of the whole land should be vested, not in individuals, but in the whole people. They are, of course, all agreed as to the gravity and difficulty of so fundamental a change, and as to the practical methods by which it is to be brought about, the ablest of men are at variance;

but the broad principle involved is so clear that no reasonable man *can* dispute it. The general claim to the soil is not a claim founded on any mere expediency; it is based in the very nature of things. If I make a pair of boots, everybody can see that I have a natural and exclusive right to the possession of these boots. They are mine because I made them; and if I sell the boots, I pass on to the purchaser exactly the same right that I have myself; and if a hundred people in succession buy those boots, they all have precisely the same right as I had originally. No man ever had, or ever can have the same right to a square yard of the earth's surface, because no man ever made a square yard of it. All the sophistry in the world cannot get over the distinction, nor all the chopping and changing, the buying and selling of a hundred generations obliterate the economic effect of it. It is a distinction inherent in the very nature of things. A man may, of course, by his labor and skill or by judicious application of capital, add to the value of land, and to that added value he has exactly the same right that I have to the pair of boots I have made. But the original land no man has made, and no man has exclusively right to it. It is common property, like the air we breathe and the rain and sunshine that give to the land its fertility; and the statesman who shall take his stand on the primary principle, and in all earnestness and honesty push on to a practical application of it, will simply open a new era in the history of Liberalism."

Is not such an article as this an indication of the great progress of the ideas for which Rev. John W. Kramer and Bishop Thomas Nulty worked? And are there not a multitude of such indications on every hand?

"'Yea,' saith the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.'"

Fort Hamilton, Feb. 13, 1899.
