

Robert Cumming's Poems.

Those who have read poems by the late Robert Cumming, as they appeared from time to time in various periodicals, will be pleased to learn of an effort to collect and publish them in book form. The matter has been taken up by James W. Hill, of 1015 Hamilton Building, Peoria, Illinois, to whom all inquiries should be addressed. These poems deserve a prominent place in the literature of the struggle for democracy, and the effort which Mr. Hill is making to preserve them is one which should be encouraged.

s. d.

**Richmond Plant.**

California has lost a good citizen and democracy an able exponent in the death at Los Angeles on February 5, in his fifty-fifth year of Richmond Plant. He was president of the Los Angeles branch of the California League for Home Rule in Taxation. His activity in Singletax work is well known to all who have kept in touch with that movement. At the time of his death he held the position of member of the Municipal Playground Commission. Mr. Plant was born in 1859 in Worcestershire, England, but had been a resident of this country since he reached the age of four. He graduated from the law department of Washington University at St. Louis and was, for a number of years, one of the counsel of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas railroad. He settled in Los Angeles in 1902, engaged in business there, and was classed among the prominent business men of the city. He leaves a widow, a married daughter Mrs. Ella M. Kendall, and a son, Richmond Plant, Jr.

s. d.

**THE DIVERTIBILITY OF PUBLIC OPINION.**

The wave of emotional excitement which for some time past has been agitating the American public concerning our national attitude towards the ancient evil of prostitution, is already passing into a stage where the end can be foreseen. It has degenerated into meaningless hysteria, and quick-witted commercialism is hastening to gain a few dollars thereby ere the wave subsides. And when it does subside, in favor of some other emotional amusement, it will have been found to have left but little result of value strewn on the sands of time. A few politician-panders, and a few "cadets" will have been jailed. And—possibly the best result of all—the sheltered woman can no longer plead ignorance as an excuse for coldly

drawing her skirts aside when she meets her sister of the pavements.

But as for lasting good that can come to the victims of our social order, little will be done by the form the agitation has now taken on. A subtle change has come over it, as often comes over some public clamor. It started out as a serious agitation which came very near leading to an inquiry into first causes, but which has degenerated into personal spite against a few petty offenders. What exercises us now is the fact, loudly proclaimed by pulpit, press, stage and popular fiction, that out of every two girls who go under in a life of shame, one is pushed, drugged, coerced or otherwise forced into it against her will. It is with this girl that our public opinion now concerns itself, and that is a decided slump in the usefulness the agitation might have shown.

Of course the fate of such a girl is a terrible thing, and no decent man or woman would hesitate for a moment to go to her rescue, when rescue is possible. But as a fundamental evidence of wrong social conditions this girl is not nearly as important as that other one out of every two—the girl who deliberately chooses a life of shame because she cannot make a living any other way; because slow starvation of the body, because slow and inevitable starvation of the young soul's right to all that life might mean, is the only alternative for her. The girl who prefers the so-called White Slavery to Industrial Slavery, to the slavery that any form of toil means today for the unskilled worker who has no asset but her labor force, this girl is a result of fundamental wrongs, wrongs that lie at the root of our entire economic and social structure. The other girl, who is forced into a life of shame against her will, is the result of certain effects of these fundamental wrongs, and it is never as important to deal with effects as it is to deal with fundamental causes—nor as useful in the long run.

Now when the question of prostitution under its new name of White Slavery first began to be publicly discussed, it was this other girl, the girl who deliberately chooses the life, because it is the only way for her to keep alive, for a short time at least—it was this girl who was the object of popular attention. And facts concerning wages paid girls in our chief industries were dragged out into the light of publicity. People began to wonder whether it was necessary for us to build up part of our vaunted national prosperity on the bodies and souls of young girls. But this was touching dangerous ground. And time and again when public opinion has come perilously near inquiring

into certain fundamental wrongs, it has been seen to veer off as if steered by an unseen hand away from this dangerous brink. For a blind horse is not in it with public opinion when it comes to the possibility of being guided, unknown to itself. Quite innocently doubtless, and believing it to be the expression of their own opinion, a number of well-known and well-intentioned people connected with welfare work, began to dispute the published reports of wages and their effect in driving girls deliberately into prostitution. Commercialism took the cue quickly and guided popular indignation away from the essential to the unessential, from the fundamental to the superficial. The toiler who preferred prostitution to industrialism no longer held the center of the stage. Our attention was called to the other girl, the unwilling victim of some individual procurer or "cadet." It is really so much more interesting, and so much simpler, to vilify and arrest a few of these vermin than to question into the sort of thing that is considered the established order in our business life.

It's the fashion to hammer politics—represented by the petty politician; but it's a dangerous thing to inquire too much into Big Business, represented by our Pillars of Society. What has happened in this question of the White Slave agitation has happened so many times already that those who are working for more fundamental reforms are sometimes saddened at the difficulty in focusing public opinion—the only medium through which lasting reforms can ever be brought about—in focusing it on the fundamental causes, and preventing it from flying off at a tangent, into a fight with superficial effects by which so little can be gained.

•And yet the world does move! Here and there the public clamor may have awakened some one soul possessing the ability to think clearly and to strike to the heart of things.

GRACE ISABEL COLBRON.

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE

PROGRESS IN PARAGUAY.

Buenos Aires, December 11.*

I send the translation of a cable that has just come in from Asuncion, dated December 6, announcing the approval by the Assembly of a new Land Tax bill:

A modification of the law with reference to Land Taxation is being debated in the Chamber of Deputies. Deputy Ayala, a member of the joint commission of Estimates and Finance, delivered a speech going fully into the ideas embodied in the bill under discussion, recommending that leave be given to study the bill clause

by clause. After being introduced as above indicated leave was immediately given on a big majority vote.

Clauses 1 and 2 were approved without discussion. When clause 3 came up, establishing progressive taxation, the Minister of Finance delivered a speech in support of the clause that was applauded by the Deputies. Deputy Gonzalez said that he considered the maximum under the graduation system, involving a 1% tax excessive. He put forward a number of reasons—among them being one that touched on the injustice of such a tax when civil war was in progress. The Minister of Finance replied, pointing out that the taxation through the customs was excessive when compared with the Direct Taxation levied in the country. Deputy Goiburú recommended a reduction of the taxes proposed and affirmed that those who held small blocks which they worked for their living should not be handicapped unduly. To these recommendations the Minister in charge of the bill replied and the House adjourned to give the committee time to prepare their further recommendations to the House.

On resuming, Deputy Suguari remarked that the House should feel pleased to have a Minister of Finance who had presented a bill of this class to the Chamber, and congratulated the committee on the detailed report attached to the bill—a report so clear and detailed as to obviate much useless discussion. He proposed a modification of subsection A, clause 3, wherein it was proposed to establish a tax of \$2 per thousand on all these properties where the value was between \$2,000 and \$5,000. He recommended that the scale be altered to read \$2 per \$1,000 on all properties between the value of \$5,000 and \$10,000. On a vote being taken this was approved.

The following scale was then approved:

	Per \$1,000.
\$10,000 to \$ 20,000.....	\$2.50
\$20,000 to 30,000.....	3.00
\$30,000 to 70,000.....	3.50
\$70,000 to 200,000.....	4.00

The other clauses were approved as presented up to those exceeding \$2,000,000 which was fixed at \$9 per \$1,000.

When discussing article 4 Dr. Chaves took the stand that it was unfair and unjust to levy a surtax on uncultivated land over and above the land taxes just approved. He stigmatized the surtax system as a most hateful way of penalizing those who did not feel inclined to work their property. He argued that the Government should make a big rebate to those who worked their land property—this rebate to take the form of a rebate of the land tax in such cases. He asked that the clause imposing a 40% surtax on uncultivated land be thrown out. To this the Minister replied that there was no reason why this clause should not stand, for if it were true—and he admitted it was so—that there were some lands far out that the Government wanted to force into cultivation, no owner would suffer unduly. For if land was far out its value would be low and consequently the penalty would be proportional; but its effects would be most beneficial in forcing into use lands close in and held idle through the indolence or obstinacy of monopolists. Deputy Ayala followed, and emphasized the necessity of maintaining the penalty of a fine on indolence, comparing it trenchantly with the present system which he affirmed was a direct tax on industry so levied as to frighten those who wished to do something for Paraguay, until the agriculture and the industries of the country died out. Deputy Chaves returned to the attack, vehemently insisting that to strike at a man simply because he owned more land than he could work was wicked and unjust and that instead of penalizing with a surtax, the Government should give rebates according to the areas and values of the land cultivated.

The Minister replied that the Land Taxes were not penalties. With reference to rebates for those who cultivated, the Minister affirmed that owners put such values on the areas cultivated that in the past all such rebates

*See Public of January 9 at page 32.