

RELIGION AND THE SINGLE TAX.*

WHAT is religion? It is a following of the Divine. The Divine is every man's inmost and best. We have had prophets and apostles, but the Divine is no respecter of persons. You are a prophet, and you are an apostle, as truly as there ever was one.

The Divine in us must be our guide. It alone can tell us what books are Bible, and what in the Bible is Bible. If the Bible is sacred to us, it is because the Divine in us recognizes the Divine in it. The Bible is not Bible because it is said to be, but because it is in the highest sense reasonable. Reason is of the Divine in man.

As human beings we all have the ability to distinguish what is good from what is evil, and what is true from what is false; and religion consists in following the good and believing the true.

All the denominations of Christendom are built up on the worship of an external God and the belief of an external revelation. Such worship and such belief are an outward show or representation of religion, but not religion.

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Real religion does not essentially need them. When religion itself comes, it comes "without observation." What is called "piety," or "external worship," is no part of real religion—it is in fact a hindrance to it. He who understands that to pray is to do cannot stop to pray; and he who understands that to worship is to live cannot stop living to worship. Many of the most deeply religious people I know or have known neither pray nor in any manner worship in the ordinary meaning of these words.

So it is plain why the churches as such take no interest in the single tax. It would replace religion as a matter of show and observation, with religion itself.

What is the single tax? It is religion in the social man. It is the conversion of the world. There has been religion before, but it has been religion in hot-houses, religion that could not bear the outside atmosphere. The single tax does not warm a room, it changes the climate. How can the individual do right when the whole government, or social body, does wrong? It is like expecting virtue in a child when all the examples set for it are vicious.

The single tax is a recognition of the fact that our present social system takes away the land from the mass of the people and gives it to a few: the revenues that come from land values are not given to the public, whose they are, but to private, so-called owners; and whereas the public

must have revenues, taxes are laid on the products of labor to make up the loss to the public of its natural revenue.

This subversion of justice at the very foundation of society, the relation of the individual to the earth itself, shows its effects in every relation of human life. Landlordism, which is the legal ownership of the earth by a few, hangs over society like a heavy black cloud, deadening and discouraging legitimate business and enterprise, fostering speculation and every device for getting without giving, or, in other words, getting something for nothing.

The fundamental or bottom relation of a human being is his relation to the earth. Private property in land is like private property in your breath—you must pay another for the right to breathe. It is slavery, essential slavery. The setting of four million slaves free from chattel slavery and turning them adrift without a foot of land was mockery. They were slaves still, and they are slaves today, as are all the landless, and the land-owners are their masters. The single tax makes land free. Under it no one would pay for land, but for special advantage in land, or in land values. The single tax makes a man his own master, or makes him really free.

Our present social system is built on injustice as its corner stone, all the other stones being set accordingly. Real religion discerns this fault in the foundation, cries out about it, and goes right

to work to correct it. The so-called church, whose religion consists in piety and external worship, does not discern the evil, and when the removal of the evil is pointed out as a religious duty it still submits to it, puts up with it, and goes on with its so-called "worship."

The single tax is the foundation of a right social structure. It is not the whole building, but it is the corner stone, from which all the other stones and parts of the building take their lines and directions.

The lifting of a hand or the wielding of a hammer is an individual act; the building of a house is a combination of numerous individual acts; but social or public acts are laws. No number of individual acts can make a public act. The public act is, so to speak, of a different degree or plane. Laws made by legislatures or congresses, or by a king acting as king, are public acts. Hence we have the expression "acts of the legislature" or "acts of Congress." The decrees of a king would come under the same head.

Individual acts are acts of the individual organism, but public acts, or laws, are acts of the social organism; and these two organisms are as distinct from each other as one individual is from another. The individual cannot perform a social or public act, neither can he be responsible for such act except so far as he consents to it and approves it. The single tax is a social or public act, based on justice. It is religion, not neces-

sarily in the individual organism, but in the social organism. It is the conversion of the public, or greater man. It is the social man, the public, the state, the nation, become religious. Individuals may in such case continue irreligious, but they would not have the state to back them in their irreligion. The influence and example of the state or nation as such would be the other way.

In the conceded right of eminent domain, or the right of the state to take land for public use, the state already declares its *right* to make the single tax the law, that is, to abolish private property in land. In some instances it exercises this right, but it denies it again when it compensates the owners for bare land so taken. The right of eminent domain is thus like our Declaration of Independence, which affirms every man's equal right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," while yet for nearly a hundred years a large mass of our citizens were held in slavery. It is like the individual who knows his duty but does not do it. It virtually says:—

"I know the right and I approve it too ;

I know the wrong, but still the wrong pursue."

The single tax is the bringing of the religion of the social man down from the plane of mere theory into actual life and practice. Acts of piety so called, or religion as connected with churches and forms of worship, are not religion itself, but

pictures or representations of religion—the show and "observation." They are things which by many have been supposed to be religion, or with which religion has been in their minds inseparably identified. We have had, and still have to some extent, what has been called a union of church and state. The state has united itself with the external representation or show of religion ; but this is not real religion in the state, any more than it is in the individual, for the laws or acts of the state are still largely characterized by the rankest injustice. The single tax is not a union of church and state, but of religion and the state.

Both the individual and the state are now called from the mere externals and representatives of religion to the life of religion itself. It is the evolution of the race. External worship is to be replaced by the externals of worship. Worship that is internal or real is a regard for justice. External worship may or may not have this within it, but the externals of worship are those acts which proceed from justice. In one case it is a representative, a picture, a show, a profession of justice ; in the other it is a correspondence, a result, an outward act of justice itself.

The general human mind has been slow to recognize the distinction between external worship and the externals of worship. It is the difference between religion *pictured* in external acts, and

religion *lived* in external acts ; or the difference between a painted picture and a living person. Yet this difference has been recognized by some from the earliest times, both in the Scriptures and in other literature. Abraham, and, in him, Levi and all the Jewish priests, paid tithes to Melchisedeck, who was himself a priest not as having father, mother or descent, but simply as "king of righteousness," or "king of peace." Christ was a priest, though not descended from Levi, but from Judah ; and when a certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and was beset by robbers and left half dead, it was the Samaritan and not the nominal, professional or "external" priest or Levite who was the real neighbor to him that fell among thieves. Even so far back as Isaiah we read (lviii. 5): "Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not *this* the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?" And in Matthew we read that the Lord said: "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head and wash thy face, that thou *appear not* unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." (vi. 17 et seq.) Thus in Isaiah the

Lord does not seem to be pleased even with that spiritual fasting which consists in *afflicting one's soul*, and in Matthew He expressly enjoins that we "*do not appear* unto men to fast." So of prayer. He tells us after what manner to pray: "Our Father, which art in heaven" etc. ; but first He says: "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet [which must be the closet of the soul, for it will not bear a literal interpretation] ; and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." (Matt. vi. 6.) It is one of the injunctions which seem to have been very little regarded.

When I look over our country and the world, and see the almost universal prevalence of landlordism, and its effects in the misery, degradation, poverty and vice that characterize the great masses everywhere, and at the same time see the so-called religious world overlooking this evil and participating in it and mainly bent on establishing and maintaining the mere forms of worship, in many cases occupying the best sites in cities and villages and seeking its contributions from the already overburdened, I am impressed with that remarkable passage in the first chapter of Isaiah, where it is said: "The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire [the fire of greed or self-seeking], the daughter of Levi is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a

garden of cucumbers, a besieged city." Real justice is crowded out; it has little consideration. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of lambs, or of he-goats. . . . Bring no more vain oblations. Incense is an abomination unto me. The new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me. I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."

Our single-tax poet, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, writes in the New York Journal,—

"I see the tall church steeples,
They reach so far, so far;
But the eyes of my heart see the world's
great mart
Where the starving people are.

"I hear the church bells ringing
Their chimes on the Christmas air;
But my soul's sad ear is hurt to hear
The poor man's cry of despair.

"Thicker and thicker the churches,
Nearer and nearer the sky—
But alack for their creeds while the poor
man's needs
Grow deeper as years roll by."

Under the single tax, therefore, I believe religion will take on an entirely new phase. As the old Jewish ceremonial observances, the clothing of its officials in priestly robes, the sacrifices of beasts and the offerings of bread and wine and oil, and the Jewish method of Sabbath observance, have wholly or in large part passed away, and are no longer considered as among the essentials of religious life, so our present preachings and prayings, our so-called external worship,—our entire system of church observances, our worship of God as an external Being or of the Bible as an external Book, and our religious observance of Sunday as more sacred than other days, will all gradually pass away as having fulfilled their use. Admitting even that every one of these once-deemed essentials of religion was absolutely of Divine origin, it is nevertheless evident that they all looked beyond themselves—that they were means to an end. That end, kept in view through all the developing stages of the

race, was the bringing about of the time when men should do simple justice to one another. No religious observance, no form of religious ceremonial, ever had a reason to be except as it looked forward to, led to, prefigured or represented, the establishment of justice between man and man.

It has been thought that the great end of religion was to promote the worship of God, as if God were a Being who loved to be worshiped. But God is accessible to us only in our fellow men. A worship of God which does not consist in doing good to our fellow men is purely theoretical and imaginary. The *love of humanity* is the worship of God. Like Abou Ben Adhem, he who loves his fellow men "leads all the rest"; or, as the Lord says, "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." All the outward religious observances of the past may be considered as represented by John the Baptist, who said with reference to Christ: "There cometh one after me whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. He must increase, but I must decrease." So may it be.

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