

Land and Freedom

FORMERLY THE SINGLE TAX REVIEW

VOL. XXV

SEPTEMBER—OCTOBER, 1925

No. 5

Current Comment

IN *America*, that well edited weekly organ of Catholic thought, Rev. M. J. Smith, S. J., says:

What member of the "white collar" class would be rash enough to build a home of his own at the price such an undertaking involves today?

No increase in salary adequate to such an enterprise can reasonably be expected.

No legislation competent to cope with the problem is even proposed. No disposition to adjust the high cost of living to fit the average clerk's income is discernable in the markets of life's necessities. The best that the small salaried man can hope for is a decent flat for his growing family, but a flat is not a home. *Without true homes our priceless heritage of freedom shrinks*; without genuine homes, religion wanes. The nation needs the growing family; religion blesses it. Its only natural and secure harbor is the home.

IT is gratifying to find religious publications discussing the problem in this spirit. The Catholic Church numbers among its adherents an overwhelming proportion of what we call the "working class"—the wage workers of the nation. Very intimately are its own growth and stability bound up with the welfare of this class; religion cannot flourish in such surroundings as hedge in so many families in centers of civilization, and from this the church must suffer both in the number and character of its members. Father Smith has stated the problem clearly.

BUT he is mistaken in saying that no legislation competent to cope with the problem is even proposed. None, it is true, in our legislatures; there the remedy is not even whispered. But it was proposed by Bishop Nulty, of Meath, Ireland, many years ago; it forms the substance of an elaborate treatise in a work entitled *Progress and Poverty*, and it is put forward by many earnest minded men and women in our own day as a remedy for the conditions Father Smith describes. Surely he is not unacquainted with it.

THERE are poor in all churches, but the Catholic Church is preeminently the church of the poor—that is her enviable distinction. It is among her glorious traditions that her comforting hand has soothed their sorrows, has ministered to them in their sickness, has watched over and aided in their struggles; no other agency was so much a part of their lives, none bore so intimate a relation to them. It is small wonder that those whose lives

are dedicated to her service should begin to concern themselves not merely with the problems of the individual poor, but with the larger problem that concerns them as a class, and whose special interests, if they can be called special, will be found to include the welfare of all classes.

THE legislation to cope with the problem *has* been proposed; the solution is ready. And it has been declared by the learned doctors of the great Catholic University at Washington, D. C., to contain nothing contrary to Catholic teachings. Any Catholic is at liberty to accept or reject it. Will not *America* open its columns to the discussion of the real remedy for the housing problem—and thus bring about a condition in which the ideal home may be something which every young couple may hope to realize, and where the religious ties that bind them to the Church may have room to grow in their affections?

PRESIDENT GREEN, of the American Federation of Labor, has announced that he will ask the next Congress to withdraw the tariff protection on textiles owing to the movement of the New England textile manufacturers to reduce wages. And why not? Is not the tariff supposed to protect American labor? Surely it is not to protect American "profits"? Yet obviously the purpose is by increasing profits to enable the manufacturer to pay higher wages. These profits pass from the consumer who pays them to the manufacturer, and the manufacturer pays part of these higher profits in higher wages. This is the theory. That it doesn't work that way is nothing to the Republican politicians who every four years appeal to the workers to keep them in power in order that the tariff may be retained in all its preposterous schedules—Schedule K being the most preposterous of them all.

OF course, manufacturers proceed on no such theory that where profits are increased, increased wages follow as a consequence. They pay only such wages as they are compelled to pay. These are regulated by conditions of the labor market, not at all by the earnings of the mills or the prices obtainable. The tariff may and frequently does enable them to reap greater profits through increased prices—and that is what the tariff is for. And if here and there some generous manufacturer raises wages because he has made larger profits, he is a rare bird and his example is not generally emulated.

WE are glad that President Green is having his fling at the hoary old humbug. Little progress can be made unless various delusions on the subject of wages are discredited in the minds of the workers. The late Samuel Gompers advised his followers to abstain from politics. Though professedly a Single Taxer, he was apparently interested only in maintaining a great organization of labor to fight organized capital—a condition little short of civil war. His followers accepted very literally his admonition to abstain from politics. As some economic questions are already political—the tariff, for example, just as the land question must some day become—Samuel Gompers and the American Federation had no active opinions about it. It would seem a perfectly fatuous policy for men interested in raising wages to act as if economic questions had no existence. Mr. Gompers made lots of friends by his policy—friends of the kind that cared little for the welfare of the workers. President Green seems willing to depart from this policy—just how far remains to be seen.

IN an article in the *London Times*, Dr. Arthur Shadwell, speaking of unemployment in England, says: "There is no facile remedy for the present ills and no government can do much. The root cause, as the *Times* has said in its leading editorial on the debate in the House of Commons, is the destruction of wealth by war—wealth gradually accumulated during many decades by work and saving."

LET us see. Was there not very recently a school of political economists who believed that war, with its consequent destruction of wealth, made a demand for employment to repair its ravages? Were not large numbers of the unthinking on this account disposed to regard wars and rumors of wars with equanimity because of their resulting benefits (supposedly) to labor in the rebuilding of devastated cities and towns? Now we have another reverse theory. Instead of the destruction of wealth calling for increased employment for its restoration, it seems that labor has all this time been living on the "wealth accumulated during many decades by work and saving." These economic theories jostle one another curiously; in this case they are mutually destructive.

BUT let Dr. Shadwell consider. Most of the wealth used in the production of wealth, tools, machinery, factories, etc., vanishes after one or two decades. Very little wealth of any kind survives after thirty years. Nor was any element of wealth destroyed during the war that could not have been replaced in the ten years succeeding. There is every reason to believe that in 1925 there is as much wealth in Great Britain as there was in 1914. Dr. Shadwell wisely refrains from giving any figures that might serve to show how baseless is his explanation for unemployment.

LABOR no more lives on capital produced in past decades than the labor of today lives on the wealth of the Pharaohs. Labor lives on land and what it produces from it, and every hour it is replenishing what it consumes and what is laid aside for the making of more wealth—tools, machinery, etc. Employment is conditioned on the terms on which it can exercise itself on the natural material, not on the goods, capital or wealth, stored up somewhere by the labor of previous decades. If labor is denied access to the reservoir from which the products of labor are drawn, unemployment is the consequence. If too great a price is demanded for such access to the natural material, labor must remain idle. This is the simple explanation of unemployment and not the wholly fanciful theory of Dr. Shadwell and the *London Times*.

WE printed in last issue the indignant disclaimer of a Santa Barbara "realtor" to the widely circulated newspaper reports of an earthquake in that city. Some years ago it will be remembered that there was a report of an earthquake in San Francisco. This was followed by a destructive fire. A correspondent of the *London Post* tells his readers that Californians do not refer to the earthquake but always to the "fire." All cities have fires; some have earthquakes. "The reason," says the correspondent, "why Californians call it a fire is because they are all boosters out there."

A LARGE part of California rests upon what the seismologists call a "fault," which is a thin crust resting upon the more solid base. This is part of California real estate. As a basis for land speculation it possesses an all too shifting foundation. To sell a fixed portion of the earth is one thing, ridiculous enough in itself, but to sell a part of it that may disappear the next morning, is quite another. One hates to buy earthquakes at the prices asked, so we must argue them away. There are no earthquakes in California; they are hereby abolished by edict of the land speculators and land owners of the state.

THE question that will not down is the one to which LAND AND FREEDOM alone among the periodicals of the country is preeminently devoted. That question is the right of all the people to the values they create. The land boom at Rockaway, which the *New York World* of Aug. 9, says has "all the hectic thrills of a mining camp rush," is an instance in point. The *World* says that "it raises anew the question whether a city in creating facilities like the Rockaway Board Walk is not entitled to a part of the unearned increment in land values resulting." LAND AND FREEDOM says it is entitled not only to part, but all of it—to the last penny collectible of this value which the people create. How important it is in a time when timid hints of this nature are hazarded in the public prints, that the only paper devoted exclusively to