

## THE GOOD SAMARITAN

By Herbert S. Bigelow

The guinea pig is not an impressive animal. But he has a remarkable name. This name is remarkable in that the animal is not a pig and did not come from Guinea.

Oliver Wendell Holmes used to protest, in his gentle way, against the misuse of the term, the Christian religion. He thought that in some cases the name guinea pig religion would be better, since what was sometimes called Christian religion was neither Christian nor religion.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is an exposition of religion as taught by the Founder of Christianity. It would not be fair to say that this parable is a complete exposition. But it is fair to say that the quality insisted upon by the parable is essential to any religion which is rightly called Christian.

Now, the priest and the Levite of the parable were the respectable representatives of the orthodox religion of their time. The Good Samaritan was a despised heretic. Yet in exalting the Samaritan the Author of the parable does not commit himself to the Samaritan heresy. He does, however, go so far as to say that the deed of the Samaritan is a more satisfactory test of a man's religion than the creed of the priest.

The Samaritan could not have improved upon himself by exchanging his humanity for the orthodoxy of the priest. But the priest could have improved upon himself by exchanging his orthodoxy for the humanity of the Samaritan.

Noble acts are better than icy opinions. Mercy covers a multitude of heresies. Whatever else the Christian religion may be, we are entitled to say that one of its essential qualities must be a warm-hearted devotion to the needs of suffering humanity.

This parable certainly teaches that if we ever happen to be on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and hear a man groaning in a ditch, it is our duty to go to the man, bind up his wounds, get him to the nearest house or hotel and see that he is cared for and not left to die. But it must be admitted that this parable will have slight application in our day if we wait to encounter precisely these circumstances.

The business of the highwayman was a conspiracy in restraint of trade. Modern governments have suppressed the highway robber. Our Supreme Courts will not permit robberies that are not reasonable. We do not tolerate any unrefined methods of getting something for nothing.

We have to deal, not with the occasional victim of personal violence, but with the widespread effects of unjust institutions. The charity of a primitive community is no substitute for the justice of a complex society.

A man cannot be a Good Samaritan to-day, certainly not in any very vital or important way, unless he has imagination to feel the suffering he never sees, and economic understanding to provide an institutional remedy for institutional ills.

The case which is presented in the parable appears to be one which called for charity and nothing more. But suppose that Jerusalem and Jericho had been self-governing communities. Suppose that the Samaritan had been a Jericho merchant, with a vote in his city and a political influence there. Suppose he had been well aware of the fact that his city government was corrupt and in league with robber bands which raided travellers under protection of the police, and divided the booty with political bosses. Suppose he had known that this wretched man was in reality, therefore, a victim of the Jericho government, which might have protected the life and property of all, but which was run to foster the predatory interests of a few.

If this had been the situation, it could not have been satisfactorily met by isolated acts of charity. After caring

for this one victim, it would have been the duty of the Samaritan to try and prevent a repetition of such crimes. It would have been his duty to try to break up the partnership between his city government and the robbers.

If we can prevent suffering it is more important to do so than to relieve it. We may feel constrained to pay our tithe to charity, but we should not omit the weightier matters of the law; certainly not if we believe that the greater part of the suffering is needlessly produced by the injustice of the law.

If we attribute the ills of humanity to personal delinquency, we shall rely, for improvement, upon agencies that aim to control individual conduct and improve personal character. If we attribute the ills of humanity to the poverty which results from unwise social arrangements, we shall rely, for improvement, upon movements that aim to change political opinion and improve economic conditions.

Some may expect too much, others too little, from social changes that seem only to alter the outer conditions of life. We hold, however, that if there should not be less charity there certainly should be more justice; that if there should not be more effort to relieve suffering, there should certainly be more effort to prevent it. Man's tendency is upward not downward. Our first duty to him is to see that he has the freest and fullest opportunity possible.

More Good Samaritans are needed in politics—men who have a vision of what an infinite mercy it would be if we could uproot from our government every vestige of special privilege and guarantee to every man an equal chance with every other.

We need Good Samaritans who have, besides the vision, the faith that this can be done; men who, with consecrated enthusiasm and a sound comprehension of economic laws, will work passionately for a truer freedom than the world has yet known. This is what we call the religion of inspired politics.

The problem of the Good Samaritan in our day is essentially a problem of government. Adequate remedies must come, not through personal, but through political action.

If the Christian religion necessarily implies devotion to the needs of suffering humanity, and if these needs cannot be served, save by the agency of government, then it is an important function of the Church to urge upon men the duty of political justice.

Let us examine two questions. What are the problems of the modern Samaritan? To what extent is government responsible for these problems?

The Samaritan of the parable found on the roadside one victim of an illegal industry. In the United States there are over three million victims a year of our legal industries. Let us erect here on this stage a wooden platform the length of a man's body. Let us raise on each side of the platform a tall timber, and join them with a beam at the top. Let us fix a heavy piece of wood to slip up and down in grooves. On the under side of this moving piece let us fasten a sharp, ugly knife, so that when the piece falls the knife will cut off the head of a man, or anything else that may be under it. This is a guillotine. Now, suppose we adjust this pleasant contrivance so that it will work automatically and as rapidly as we desire. Let us set the clock so that the knife will drop every ten seconds. Then every minute there are six blows of the knife, and each blow represents what is said to be a needless and preventable injury or sickness or death in the United States. If I talk an hour the knife will fall three hundred and sixty times. It will fall three hundred and sixty times the next hour and the next. It will fall three hundred and sixty times while you are eating your dinner. It will fall three hundred and sixty times while you are playing on the floor with your child. It will not cease while you sleep. Through the long night and the next day, and through all

the nights and all the days of the year it will keep falling.

These are not the victims of cut-throats on the highway. These are the men who are buried in the mines, where they are digging coal for our hearths. They are the men who are cast into fiery furnaces where they are blasting our steel. They are the men whose arms are caught in the looms and whose blood dyes our tapestries. They are the men who slip in the night and fall beneath the wheels of our trains. All along the highways of our industrial life are the bruised and the maimed, the dead and the dying.

Oh, yes, we are Good Samaritans. We build hospitals. Also we provide for factory inspection and we pass laws to check this terrible toll. But what about the killing speed of our factories? What about the mad rush of our industrial life, and reckless waste of our men? Are men goaded by fear of want? Are they lured by the chance of extortionate gain? If this is so, is it because God has been niggardly with us? Is it because nature has not made provision enough? Is it not rather that at the core of our industrial life there is the cancer of special privilege? Our government is not yet run in the interest of the life and property of all. It is not in league with robbers who kill men on the highways. But it is used for the defence of the privileges of the few, by which exploitation is legalised and industry is rendered more fatal than war.—(THE PUBLIC, Chicago.)

All men are agreed as to the ethics of the Single Tax, that the earth was made for all men and not for a few. This is what Mr. George calls an instinct, an intuition of the human mind, a primary perception of the human reason. If we were to-day starting anew, the Single Tax would be manifestly wise as a method of taxation; if it could to-day be put into operation without injustice to anyone, it would still be a manifestly wise plan of taxation. Can it be done?

The Single Taxer is firmly of the opinion that it is no part of God's economy that justice to one man can work injustice to another; that for every alleged injustice to one man there would be a far greater justice wrought to hundreds and to thousands; that the vacant lot which is his only all, is not the poor man's universe; that his individual loss or benefit will be measured, not by his relation to that vacant, unproductive lot, but by his relation to the social fabric into which he is woven and to the universe of which he is a part; and that for every alleged confiscation there would be a score of compensations.

If the moral theory of the "compensationists" were sound, it would apply—and many of its advocates claim that it does apply—as well to slavery as to landlordism, so that slaves could not be justly set free unless the masters were compensated. The most outrageous act, then, of what the "compensationists" call confiscation, was committed by God Himself, when He led the Israelites out of Egypt. Instead of compensating the Egyptians, who thereby lost valuable "private property" which had had the sanction of four hundred years' acquiescence, He engulfed in the Red Sea those whose sensitiveness to the injustice of "confiscation" stirred them to follow and reclaim their confiscated property.

If the cinder is not removed from your eye at once, and inflammation followed, what then do you do? Do you bathe the head, apply a plaster to the back, hot water bottles to the feet, and some specific to the stomach? Or do you forthwith remove the speck from the eye whatever the pain it costs you? The smaller the offending cinder, the more intense oftentimes the inflammation, and the more difficult of removal. The longer the operation is delayed the more painful the conditions. While guarding well "the apple of the eye," what irritation from mote or beam or cinder can compare with the social irritation caused by injustice?—C. B. FILLBROWN, "The A.B.C. of Taxation."

## UNTAXING OF BUILDINGS

### New York City Committee's Report

We are indebted to the City of New York Committee on Taxation for having sent us a copy of their Final Report and of two accompanying separate reports prepared by Dr. Robert Murray Haig.

The recommendations of the Committee were briefly referred to in our March issue, p. 311. The majority were opposed to the taxation of land values and the untaxing of buildings. They recommended a State income tax or if that was not feasible, a habitation tax, an occupation tax and a salaries tax; these are grouped and referred to as an "abilities tax." The majority was also in favour of a tax on the increment of land value. The minority, composed of Messrs. F. C. Leubuscher, D. F. Wilcox, Lawson Purdy, F. C. Howe and F. B. Shipley were in favour of a law "requiring a progressive reduction of the tax rate on buildings continuing until the rate on buildings should be one-half the rate on land."

The Committee's Report is chiefly of interest as a compilation of opinions for and against the taxation of land values. There is little else in its 376 pages. The concurring and dissenting Memoranda on other forms of taxation never get very far away from the question of site-values. We notice, among the witnesses called to give testimony, Messrs. Benj. C. Marsh, Charles T. Root, Benj. Doblin, Peter Aitken, J. P. Kohler, James R. Brown, Chas. O'Connor Hennessy, and Chas. H. Ingersoll, and Miss Grace Isabel Colbron.

The separate reports by Dr. Robert Murray Haig are entitled, "Some Probable Effects of the Exemption of Improvements from Taxation in the City of New York," and "The Exemption of Improvements from Taxation in Canada and the United States." The former is of statistical interest and shows among other matters (a) the effects of the change upon the tax burdens of the various Boroughs in the City and (b) the effects upon the tax burden of various types of property. Naturally, the burden on the land would be increased, and Dr. Haig estimates that if buildings were exempted from taxation to half their value, the amount now paid by the landowners in New York City would be increased from 84 million to 104 million dollars. The effects of the change upon various types of property depend on the ratio of the value of the land to the value of improvements in each case as compared with the average ratio of land value to improvement value throughout the City. Accordingly, in a number of properties, the total tax burden (because of the high ratio of land value) will be increased despite the fact that the improvement is exempted to half its value, but these properties are off-set in much greater numbers by those in respect of which the tax burden will be considerably diminished.

Dr. Haig's report on the Canadian and United States cities that have adopted the principle of exempting improvements from taxation is of more practical value. It provides the fullest and most authoritative story we have yet seen concerning what has been done in Vancouver, Victoria, Edmonton, Calgary, Houston, Pueblo, Everett, Pittsburgh, Scranton, and elsewhere. We may have occasion to return to this report for some account of the measure of progress carried out in these cities.

A. W. M.

M. L. G. Brettoneau (Nimes, France), in renewing his subscription to LAND VALUES, writes: "I take this opportunity of assuring LAND VALUES and its editorial staff of my admiration and sympathy, and of expressing the hope that the ideals of justice that you advocate will finally triumph."