

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

HERE is a quotation from an article by George B. Cutten, President of the Colgate University, in the *New York Times* of recent date:

To those who claim that religion is not meeting the moral demands of the time, it should be recalled that we are moving very swiftly in this century, and new social problems are arising with astonishing rapidity.

From its nature religion is conservative, and religious solutions must from necessity lag behind the presentation of problems; but looking at things in the large, as for example, a thousand years at a time, or even a century, we cannot help recognize the consistency with which religion has met and conquered presented problems even if unusually late in doing so—as, for example, the case of slavery. Nor has religion attacked the problem in any craven spirit, but boldly every enemy has been faced and never has religion refused to pay the price, as great as that price has sometimes been.

One has only to note the problems now being attacked to realize that though slow in starting, there has never been any question of retreating when once the conflict has begun. War, alcoholic intoxication, child labor and social justice are now on the program, and we may expect these matters to be settled and settled right if it requires centuries.

BY "religion" it must, we suppose, be understood that President Cutten means *organized* religion, though it must be confessed that the term as used by him seems to mean one thing at one time and something else at another. In this way it is easy to make out a case for the defence. We may say that the aroused religious sense of the people did finally result in the abolition of slavery. Here and there Christian men and women made their opposition heard. But it was not the organized church, though here and there were churches to which slavery was abhorrent and which were not afraid to say so through the voices of their pastors and often by explicit declaration.

BUT the veil had best be drawn over the attitude of organized Christianity, both North and South, in the days when the abolition of slavery was being agitated. To say that "religion (organized religion?) met and conquered presented problems—as for example the case of slavery," is to offend one's intelligence. Surely the knowledge of history in the possession of the most casual

student is not to be thus openly affronted. He knows better even if President Cutten has persuaded himself to the contrary.

WE are glad to know that the problems of war and social justice "are now on the programme." The churches had better hurry up before the religious conscience of the people overtakes them. They have not to date shown any particular courage in facing the problem of war, and as for social justice they are for the most part discreetly silent. Social justice, rightly understood, means the deprivation of some social or economic privilege for some one or more of the pwholders. For the pastor to preach it may mean the loss of his pulpit—let us say the loss of his job.

ONE thing, however, is gratifying in President Cutten's article. It is one of the signs that the church has begun the abandonment of the notion that religion has to do only with the regulation of individual conduct. He is evidently of the opinion that great social evils are to be met and overcome, and that the church should be an agency in this war against them. And when the church realizes that it is the denial of fundamental social justice that keeps men in bondage to evil it will see the necessity of plainer speaking than has been its habit. If organized religion, now losing its hold upon so many men and women, ever induces them to affiliate with the Christian churches, it must change its attitude with respect to the great problems of society—above all, it must seek the answer to the question why the natural resources of the country, the bounty of the Creator, are the property of the few, and whether such division of the earth is in accordance with divine intent, or consistent with divine wisdom.

IT is the augury of a new spirit in the Socialist party that it has now abandoned the declaration of class consciousness and a class conflict. There was never anything in this. Luke North pierced it to the heart when he declared that the only true division was between "those who cared and those who didn't." There are classes, of course, and some of these are based upon the possession of economic privileges. But the true appeal is to Man—"I am for men," said Henry George, when he was introduced at one of his last public meetings as "a friend