

THE CRY OF THE OPPRESSED.

We have pleasure in publishing the following paper, which was recently read by a member of the English League to the "Young People's Society of Christian Endeavour" at Eastbourne. It is a good example of the line of advocacy which we are glad to know is being increasingly used by some of our friends in appropriate circles. The lecturer is a nurseryman, and an active helper in the Land Values movement, whose pen has often rendered good service to the cause.

"What in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support;
That to the height of this great argument
I may assert *Eternal Providence*
And justify the ways of God to men."

—MILTON.

"Thou hast created all things, for Thy pleasure they are and were created."—Rev. iv., 11.

It may be—should be—that when we see a little child, or any of the unsullied works of God's creation, we are filled with an intense longing that all creation should give pleasure. That was why they were created; it was "our Heavenly Father's pleasure." We act too often on the assumption that He is *not* the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. We throw over faith in Heb. xiii., 9, and pay little heed to what takes its place. But that "all things" do not give pleasure is vividly stated in the margin of Isaiah v., 7. We find where God looked for the "plant of His pleasures" He beheld a "*scab*."

We find various references in the Bible, where God, in looking on the world, said, "I will know," "I have heard," "I have seen." *The people "cried, and their cry came unto God."* It is well to notice the people groaned; it does not say here, to God. They were too oppressed to look up; *and yet He heard.* The cry of the oppressed goes up to-day. He looks for justice but beholds oppression—*beholds a scab.*

What was the particular form of oppression, which merited this terrible stigma? In Isaiah v., 8, we have it, where a woe is pronounced against those who "join house to house, and field to field till there be no place." In Micah ii., 2, "*They covet fields and take them.*" Amos gives under the heading of "*Mighty Sins*," "*Manifold Transgressions*" (terms not here applied to idolatry) "*treading on the poor,*" "*taking burdens of wheat,*" and even "*panting in their greed for the very dust of the earth on the head of the poor.*"

The oppressed Israelites cried once to Nehemiah. It appears that there had been a time of great distress—people with large families found it impossible even to provide bread and much less to pay the King's taxes. They in their distress had applied to the nobles, and borrowed money by mortgaging their lands. The interest was so high that they could not pay it; they found themselves, with what to-day is called a foreclosure. The nobles stepped in and took the lot. The people found themselves *working on their own lands, but for other people*—the nobles.

The land which God had given them had passed from them, and they and their children were in bondage. They could not help themselves. They saw that their children to all generations would be slaves to the landowners. They could never get it back, because they said "*other people had their lands.*" A professor of political economy might have spent years in investigating the cause of their bondage, *but the people knew.* They knew then, what we are surely learning now. Note what Nehemiah did: "He consulted with himself"—rebuked the nobles, charged them with usury before the great assembly and asked them to restore the lands; which they did. Before leaving Nehemiah, and comparing the cry of the oppressed in the year B.C. 445 with the same cry in the year A.D. 1911, it is well to state that Nehemiah was acting strictly in the spirit of the Mosaic Law, which had been given nearly a thousand years before. Nehemiah could quite appreciate the plea of the poor people when they said "our flesh is as their flesh and our children as their children, and yet we are in bondage to our brethren."

To know how to deal with land monopoly, the root cause of poverty, He had no need to go to Babylon or even down to Egypt.

Speaking of the Law of Moses, the late Henry George wrote: "Moses depicted a Commonwealth, whose ideal it was that every man should sit under his own vine and fig tree, with none to vex him. A commonwealth in which

none should be condemned to ceaseless toil, in which even for the beast of burden there was rest. A commonwealth in which the family affections might bind each member into a living whole." The law of Moses interposed. At every point its barriers to the selfish greed that, if left unchecked, will surely separate men into ruling classes and ruled classes; millionaires and tramps, *leisured* classes and *labouring* classes. Its Sabbath day and Sabbath year secured to the lowliest, rest and leisure. With the blast of the trumpet at Jubilee, the slave goes free and a re-division of land secures again to the lowliest, his fair share in the Bounty of the Creator—everywhere—in everything the dominant idea is that of our homely phrase—"live and let live."

Under the Mosaic Law, land that had been parted with under stress of circumstances, was returned free at Jubilee. In this country we reverse that law, and at the end of the term of years the land goes back to the landowner, together with the labours of the tenant.

A Christian worker visiting a poor little home, to see if he can be of service to the inmates, is met on the threshold with the spectre of grim poverty. The man inside is out of work, his children are being slowly starved before his eyes, his wife is out at work (this is not in China or India, but in this country). The man feels his position keenly, his whole being wrapt in hoping to be able to work for his family, and he angrily rejects your "Good News." Judging God by the selfishness of men, he bitterly rejects Christ. He will tell you of "how he lost his last job," how his home has been broken up, his club run out. All he asks of his fellow-men is an opportunity to work, to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, and with all our Churches and all our civilisation he cannot get it.

Thousands and thousands of the workers in every country are in this plight every year. It has been going on for years. Means without end are being devised to patch up the wrecks that are made—but none provide him with natural labour to prevent him from falling.

Yet we have had our Nehemiahs. Men who "consulted with themselves and rebuked the nobles." Men of whom this nation was not worthy have protested all down the ages against the robbery of the people's lands. It is most important to notice here one difference. In Nehemiah's case, the lands were parted with by the people, by their own act, *in time of stress.* And yet they were restored. In our day and our own country the land has not been parted with by the people by their own act, but has been taken from them by force and fraud.

We have had our Nehemiahs, some we burned, others were hung, drawn and quartered, were executed on Tower Hill, were shot. We have paid no heed to them as a nation. Their memory is still held in esteem by some who have no practical sympathy with the cause for which they died. Bishop Latimer was one. He charged the nobles with enslaving the people. He told the Church of his day "that if they wished to gild Christ in their Churches—to see to it that before their eyes people died not of starvation." Bishop Latimer died at the stake. Lord Protector Somerset did his utmost to restore the commons to the people, because he saw it was producing misery and unemployment. He caused an enquiry to be made, as to how the land had been taken from the people. He was executed amid the tears of the populace.

Gerrard Winstanley, one of the leaders of the digger movement, led some landless men to some waste ground in Surrey. There they commenced to dig and as they worked they sang,

"Stand up now diggers all; the gentry are all around,

"Their wisdom's so profound to cheat us of our ground."

The diggers were shot down and their leader sent to the Tower.

Has the Christian Church nothing to say on behalf of the man in despair? Nothing to say to the oppressor?—or rather, are we not by our silence agreeing with the oppressor? Is there no modern Elihu, who "has yet words to speak on God's behalf"? The fear of persecution may have something to do with the silence or the feebleness of the protest. Worship regularly in any place you like to-day, or even stand at the street corners and very little persecution, if any, will come your way. All the land monopolist wants is to be *let alone*, and he will let you alone. He will subscribe to your Church. But, simply seek to secure, for every child that is born, an equal right to the free gifts of the Creator,

tell the nation that the land was intended by God for the use of the people, and not to be the sport of the rich, and you will find very real persecution. Your goods will not be wanted, your services may be dispensed with. Open your mouth for the oppressed and you are marked for destruction.

The Christian Church has nothing to do with being a divider of wealth: but it has a mission to the conscience of the nation. The Church has no right whatever to listen to a compromise. A sin that is almost universal, is none the less a sin. Poverty on God's rich earth is a crime. But it is no crime to be poor. It is the veriest blasphemy to assert that God has not made ample provision for all the people to live—and live too—not on the borders of starvation, but in comfort.

One man, it has been proved, can produce in one year, on as much land as he can cultivate, food sufficient, not only for himself but for nine others. With broad acres all around given to sport, men are unemployed because they cannot have access to the fields from which their forefathers were driven.

In a future state, of course, we know there will be great change: the first here will be last there. But this is man's day. We have around us abundant material for all to live comfortably by their own labour. It is folly to say this has nothing to do with us—it has all to do with us!—the honour of the Creator is concerned. We are his witnesses. The soul of that man is at stake—he wants none of your charity; all he wants is justice, just a little of God's earth to live and work on.

The rich man, too, is every bit as precious in God's sight. When Christ told the young man to go and sell all that he had and give to the poor, it was not so much the poor just then that our Lord was concerned about; it was the young man. He saw a soul in danger of being strangled by riches. *We know many such, and have corresponding responsibility.*

The inquiry going on in the press as to what to do with Golf Caddies after they leave the links at 17 is simply a symptom of the danger of land monopoly. Land and labour can both be more profitably employed than in sport.

The Church as a Church does not open its mouth to-day for the dumb and those who are oppressed—at least, not the oppressed at home. Too often it fears to give offence, or is found itself among the rich owners of the people's land.

And yet the vast majority of the people of these islands have no right whatever to their native land, save to walk the streets. From thousands and thousands of homes goes up the cry of the oppressed. Far worse in every detail than that which obtained in Nehemiah's day. The cries are entering into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. The warnings of James to the rich are hushed: the rich and the poor perish together, not because the Church is lacking in preaching the Gospel—*this she ought to have done*—and not to have left the other (elementary principles of justice) undone.

Henry George spent his life in showing how the injustice, which after all is an accumulation of centuries of wrong, might be remedied in a manner so gentle in its working, so just in its principles, so simple in its practise, with no injustice to the rich, and yet of untold benefit to the race. Founded, too, on natural law and in full accord with the teaching of Scripture, he and his writings have been met with a conspiracy of silence. He was one of our Nehemiahs. He rebuked the nobles and was loaded with abuse. However, to-day the cause which was so dear to his heart is gaining ground in every part of the world. Nations are beginning to realise that we have had a prophet amongst us. The cry of the oppressed is not to be met with this or that policy: by the artificial division of wealth or restriction of trade or the controlling of it by new machinery. The remedy lies in a simple act of supreme justice:—The admission that every man, woman and child has an inalienable right to live and to use God's earth.

Henry George, in closing his great book *PROGRESS AND POVERTY*, writes: "The truth I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would never have been obscured. But it will find friends who will toil for it; suffer for it—if need be die for it. This is the power of *Truth*. Look around to-day. Lo! here, now, in our civilised society, the old allegories are true. Into the valley of the shadow of death yet often leads the path of duty, through the streets of Vanity Fair walk Christian and Faithful, and on Greatheart's armour ring the clanging

blows. How they call, and call, till the heart swells that hear them!! Strong souls of high endeavour, the world needs you *now*. Iron wheels still go over the good and true that might spring from human lives. And they fight, though they may not know each other—somewhere, sometime, will the muster roll be called."

F. G. MILLER.

TINKERING AT A GRAVE SOCIAL PROBLEM.

In their report for the year ended June 30th last, recently issued, the St. Pancras Distress Committee state that their chief trouble has been their inability to find employment for more than a small proportion of applicants, though fewer applications were received last year than in any year since 1906-7. Many families had entirely lost their homes before making application, while over 80 per cent. occupied not more than two rooms.

The committee earnestly hope that they may not be appointed for another year without having more powers given them to drain their "stagnant pools," or to join together the disconnected ends of the industrial system.

"Altogether," the report concludes, "in surveying the human material on which the committee have to work, there is much room for despondency. The women have no special skill. The men are mostly in the prime of life, but have got into blind alleys in which there seems no opening for light; their rents are high; they occupy one, or at most two, rooms; many of them have been on the register again and again; they have entered their names on the books of the committee, and out of 1,456 registered, only 350 have been given work. It is an unsatisfactory result. It looks like tinkering with a grave social problem. The committee feel, as they have felt for the last three years, that it is unfair to ask public men to give up so much of their time to gain acquaintance with some of the running sores of the society in which we live and to afford them neither the power nor the facilities to do anything towards a permanent cure."

This is one more revelation of the cruel conditions under which the majority of the working classes have to live. It reminds us painfully of Thorold Rogers' statement that there is a condition of things in the east-ends of our great cities and towns that, for its misery and inhumanity, is unexampled not only in the history of our own country but in the history of the whole civilised world. It is a sickening story. Men, mainly in what should be the prime of life, are forced into blind alleys from which there seems no outlet.

The members of this Committee are disheartened, and no wonder. The need for reform is great; yet there is no immediate prospect of relief. It is unfair, they say, and quite rightly, to be asked to devote time to gaining acquaintance with the social condition of the people, while conscious of their inability to do anything towards effecting a permanent cure.

There is one note continually running through these reports and this is that rents are high. Herein, we believe, lies the prime cause of the trouble. High rents mean low wages and poverty. And high rents mean more than this. They mean that opportunities for development are restricted and workers thereby denied the opportunity of employment.

Politicians in a vague way are coming to recognise the connection between the land question and this grave social problem. Until the land question is settled these Distress Committees can do nothing but tinker at social conditions. They may investigate; put the names of the victims on lists and subdivide them into sections; give occasional doles of soup, or an odd job or two at wood chopping; but they will always be brought up against the stern reality of their inability to do anything towards a permanent cure.