

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

IT may be that there is a widespread awakening to the importance of a reserve of free land to the prosperity of our country; that the vanishing of our frontiers is the cause of many of our present woes, including unemployment, low wages and depressions. It may even be that the influence of Henry George's teachings on this subject is permeating the American mind. At any rate, Mr. W. J. Cameron saw fit to speak out against this seeming tide of opinion in a recent talk on the Ford Sunday Evening Hour, broadcast over a nation-wide network, on the subject of "Frontiers."

IN the course of his talk, Mr. Cameron said: "To hear some people complain that there are no more frontiers, one might gain the impression that frontiers were made of frosted cake and candy. One might think also that we are a nation of frustrated frontiersmen imprisoned—suffocated—within these paltry three million square miles that comprise continental United States . . . The answer is that *no* frontiers have vanished—that every sort of frontier that ever was is still here. But to find a frontier one must first be a frontiersman. Several points are conveniently forgotten when we talk about frontiers. The first is that there is nothing very comfortable or inviting about them . . . They make men pay as the price of 'to have and to hold,' their sweat and blood . . . Is this the frontier whose passing you bewail? Then please be comforted; you can find it almost anywhere in the United States today. Any day you choose you can exchange the hardships of civilization for this. The United States is not settled yet . . . A population map of the United States will show you that ours is the most sparsely populated of all the great nations . . . 'But,' they say, 'there's no more *free land*.' *There never was any free land*. Frontiers are never *easy* and they are never *free*. The first man on the spot pays the highest price even if he does not pay a dollar . . . There is living room here that never was used, vast unoccupied empires waiting . . . The fact is, the price of pioneering is too high for most of us to pay . . ."

THERE are several points in Mr. Cameron's dissertation with which we can agree. It is true that "every sort of frontier that ever was is still here." It is true that the price of pioneering is "sweat and blood." It is true that the United States is sparsely populated. It is true that there are "vast unoccupied empires waiting." And finally, but in a different sense from Mr. Cameron's, it is true that "the price of pioneering is too high for most of us to pay."

HAVING yielded to Mr. Cameron on the foregoing, perhaps it would not be amiss for us to ask a few questions:—Why is it that shipload after shipload of pioneers came to America centuries ago, knowing that they would not find "frosted cake and candy"? Why do not a great number of pioneers come from Europe today? Do they prefer the conditions with which they are now faced to the hard life of the frontiers? Are they not willing to pay the price of "sweat and blood" in order to live in peace and freedom? If they are willing to come (and God knows they are!), why do we erect immigration barriers, when there are so many frontiers to cultivate? What about our own millions of unemployed—descendants of pioneers; are they too lazy to work on the millions and millions of acres of fertile land now out of use? Do they prefer the comfort of the park bench and the municipal lodging house? Should not our Government give public notice that there are "vast unoccupied empires waiting"? Would no one respond? Why was there such a desperate rush when the Government gave out similar notices in the nineteenth century?

ARE the migrant workers samples of people who prefer the comforts of civilization to the hardships of the frontier? Are they not modern pioneers seeking new frontiers? Why do they not find them, when they exist everywhere? When the "bootleg" coal miners went to work on a large company's deserted mine, were they not pioneering? Does Mr. Cameron recall their fate? Does he know that there are vast empires comprising millions of fertile acres in our middle West, through which one can drive all day without seeing a man at labor, and that a landless wretch would receive treatment as a criminal were he to attempt to cultivate them on his own initiative? Is it barely possible that the barb-wire fence surrounding these empires is keeping off our modern pioneers? Can it be that extortionate rents are the present-day "price of pioneering"?

IN declaring that "there never was any free land," Mr. Cameron displays a naivete not in keeping with the seriousness of his subject. Can he possibly harbor a definition of "free" land as a place where men's requirements would produce themselves without human exertion? Not even the lowliest schoolboy could, for long, entertain the thought of such a paradise on earth. For the benefit of Mr. Cameron, may we remind him that from the very beginning men have never asked for an earth free of the natural obstacles imposed in His infinite wisdom by the Creator—what they have cried out against are the unnatural obstacles which have been wrought by Man himself.