

The problem I set out to prove was the Relationship of Land to the Industrial Situation of the Future. It is difficult in a limited time to do more than to create a desire for further study, but I hope I have said sufficient to justify my assertion that the land question has a very direct bearing upon the problem of the "Fullest Possible Production of Wealth" and upon the question of establishing a Satisfactory "status" for labour in the new conditions of Industrial Life which confront us.

At the close of his lecture Mr. Smithson showed to the Club a number of very interesting diagrams taken from Louis F. Post's "Outlines of Lectures on the Taxation of Land Values," published by THE PUBLIC, Ellsworth Building, Chicago, and which may be obtained from Mr. F. Skirrow, 71, North Street, Keighley, price 1s. 6d., post free.

[We are indebted for this report to the printed proceedings of the Bradford Business Science Club.—ED. L V.]

WHY NOT REFORM OUR REFORMS?

BY ETHEL WEDGWOOD

(Part of an Article in *The Independent Suffragette*, April, 1918.)

British women have received the vote—some of them—and in accordance with the best traditions of the Mother of Democratic Parliaments, *i.e.*, with as few sacrifices as possible to logic or general principle.

Having now won this symbol of Liberty, what do we propose doing with it? A babel of political programmes answers the question, and issues from an army of efficient women well-trained in parochial and municipal affairs, and all longing to spring-clean these Augean stables which hitherto they have only been allowed to "tidy up." Legislation against Drink, Legislation against Vice, extended Compulsory Education, more Sanitation, Motherhood Endowment, Prison Reform, Cows and Crèches, Taxation of the unduly Rich, State patronage of the unduly Poor; to every reform a Royal Commission and another Government Department, on all of which women will now find their share of power and activity.

How wearisome a tune it sounds among the fresh voices of the coming Resurrection! Are not we a little weary of these "stunts" of the Mere-Man Age? And cannot that new spirit which has forced even legislators to revise the relation of the sexes devise some better interpretation than Acts of Parliament for the thoughts and hopes that, all the world over, are whispering among the young generation during this last great crisis that is the death agony of the old world? The young spirit is revolutionary; it will overleap fresh barriers as it already mocks established ones. It is also creative, and its genius demands freedom and unbounded room to work out its new designs. We think ourselves progressive when we lead along the old roads of reformation and advanced thought; but our cherished reforms will be the stumbling-blocks of the New Age, unless we revise our whole reading of the social sciences and re-write, amongst other things, our books of economics. To do this a little hard thinking is necessary on independent lines;

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and lately women have been so much occupied in invading fresh fields of action that they have been content to adopt even their revolutionary ideas ready-made. . . .

This Fabian and Marxian Socialist idea of society as a complex artificial construction, requiring constant readjustment of its parts in order to work smoothly, rests on two false analogies—one that society somehow resembles that industrial machinery which was developed about the same time as this theory; the other that it is like those complex "organisms" that contemporary science showed to have been "evolved" from the simple cell (*i.e.*, the individual).

As a practical School of Economics, State Socialism (in which one may include programmes for social reform of all the political parties) was a natural result of the total breakdown of the Manchester economic principles, to which Liberals and manufacturers adhered a century ago. This doctrine of *laissez faire*—*i.e.*, of unrestrained exploitation and competition—absolutely failed to satisfy the ordinary claims of conscience or to cope in any way with the gigantic evils being reared by "big business" methods; and in revulsion against its cold impersonality (that cloaked the grossest selfishness) reformers rushed into a much more human, if mistaken, meddlesomeness, and set loose the floodgates of social reform.

As a matter of fact, "Manchesterism" failed, not because its reasoning was fallacious, but because its major premise was not a fact. It assumed that the individual worker was free, whereas he was the slave of monopoly; and modern schools, while projecting many ameliorations to this slavery, offering him a change of masters, have not seriously planned nor believed in his emancipation.

Individual liberty has always—except for isolated thinkers like William Morris—been a mirage, and æsthetic preference not a practical economic possibility; and, therefore, social reform for the last hundred years has tended to restricting individual liberty rather than to enlarging it.

Yet, more and more this thirst for liberty increases and grows with repression. Three years ago a Liberal journalist proclaimed that the days of individualism were over. I wonder whether he would reassert it now after three years experience of "Dora," and with the mutterings of "Young" Europe in his ears? It is time we re-examine the old assumptions and see whether individual liberty is not, after all, a social and economic possibility, before it sweeps over us in the form of anarchy. Henry George, the founder of the Single Tax School of Economics, declared forty years ago that it was not only possible, but the only basis for a flourishing commonwealth, and that the root of all our social troubles lay precisely in that lack of individual freedom caused by the private ownership of land—taking "land" to cover all those sources of wealth and material for labour that the earth contains. He contended with sound arguments and data that if this primary monopoly of the source of wealth and work were abolished, we should have no need for further interference, and that all men might be not only comfortable but also free.

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