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The One Thing Needful. By THOMAS CAMERON.

To a large and ever-increasing section of Social Reformers it is clearly manifest that most of the evils which afflict society to-day have one origin; that they are due, not to the regular operation of natural laws, but to their direct violation: not so much to the inherent weakness and depravity of human nature, as to the fundamental violation of justice and denial of equal rights involved in the recognition of private property in land.

To them it seems clear that the utmost possible advance in civilization, the widest extension of political freedom, education, temperance, thrift, co-operation, or even the most paternal direction and control by a beneficent government, will be of comparatively little avail in bringing about a better social state, that, on the contrary, all such reforms will eventually accentuate present social evils, and tend to promote greater and greater inequality, so long as we permit the basis of all human life and action—the earth upon which and from which all must live—to be regarded as the private property of individuals.

This is the canker at the root of modern civilization: this is society's bane, which all through the centuries, more or less, has poisoned at its source the stream of human progress.

Rousseau, in some of his writings, says:—

The first man who, having enclosed a plot of ground, took upon himself to say, "This is mine! " and found people silly enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society. How many crimes, how many wars, how many murders, how much misery and horror would have been spared the human race if someone, tearing up the fence and filling in the ditch, had cried out to his fellows, "Give no heed to this imposter, you are lost if you forget that the produce belongs to all, the land to none."

While there may be many contributory causes, the root cause is undoubtedly that which we have already stated.

It is the continuous increase of rent, that tribute which industry must pay to the landholders for the mere privilege of using land, which, keeping pace with the increase in wealth production, has gradually absorbed the fruits of all the improvements which human ingenuity has devised. Thus has privilege and monopoly, hand in hand, been enabled to flourish and fatten on the earnings of industry: monopoly has begotten monopoly, and opened up many avenues to oppression, injustice, and wrong.

It is the unequal pressure of this initial injustice, acting and re-acting on the whole fabric of our industrial and social life, which, on the one hand breeds perpetually the grinding poverty, or the haunting fear of it, with all the many evils which such harsh and cruel conditions of life bring in their train; and, on the other hand showers a superabundance of the good things of this life on a class who, doing comparatively little or nothing at all to earn the wealth thus unjustly bestowed upon them, out of the very emptiness of their lives fall a prey to evils clearly traceable to the no less unnatural condition of life which present social mal-adjustments impose upon them.

The reform we advocate then, is the removal of this great wrong upon which the present social structure rests, and, which more than anything else, has prevented the true and natural growth of society.

This is what we must do. It is the one thing absolutely needful to remedy the evils we complain of—not that we think the millennial period will immediately follow, for, we recognise that it is impossible to effect all at once radical changes such as we hope for, either in individuals or communities, but, we insist that to reach the goal we long for, namely—the institution of a better and happier social order — the first step must of necessity be towards the abolition of private ownership of land.

It cannot be too strongly insisted upon that this is the primary reform, and must precede all other reforms if our hopes of social betterment are ever to be realised.

Take almost any of our most pressing social problems, examine well as to their cause, search and. probe to the bottom and you will invariably find that they all centre in the problem of a more just and equitable distribution of wealth —the securing to each worker in the social hive the full produce of their labour.

Tell us then, ye diletante students, of the problem of the ages, whose overstrained vision, filled with the bright mirage in the distance, fails to detect the fruitful oasis so near at hand? Tell us, ye host of would-be reformers whose futile schemes of social regeneration perish of inanition almost ere they are born, how this central problem is to be solved so long as our mother earth, the source of all wealth, of all the material elements necessary to human existence, is permitted to remain the private property of individual members of the human family?

It cannot but be fruitless of good to pursue as remedies elaborate schemes based on the idea of an enlightened, benevolent despotism, which shall compulsorily ensure "from each according to their ability," and "to each according to their wants." It will be well if all imbued with such chimerical ideas would pause in their present course and consider what the object is they are aiming at, and if the principles and projects they are supporting are likely to attain the end they have in view. Carlyle, in his essay on Chartism," in speaking of the rights of man, thus tersely puts the whole matter:—

Indeed if you will once sufficiently enforce that Eighth Commandment the whole "rights of man "are well cared for; I know no better definition of the rights of man. *Thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not be stolen from.* What a society were that; Plato's Republic, More's Utopias, mere emblems of it! Give every man what is his, the accurate price of what he has done and been, no man shall any more complain, neither shall the earth suffer any more.