

## Social Justice and the Jew

IF there is anything that gives Judaism a distinguishing mark among the religions of the world it is its insistence on the primary importance of social justice as between man and man. Social justice has always been a characteristic of true Judaism, evinced at various times in varied surroundings and in divers ways. The laws of the Prophets and the Rabinnical writings have ever been a source of inspiration to the Jewish race in all their political activities. Social justice in ancient Judaism was not only one point, but composed the chief part of religious life; and the more profoundly religious knowledge penetrated, the more weight was laid upon this, until the prophets declared absolutely that religion and a knowledge of God were identical with social justice. Thus, already nineteen hundred years ago, Philo of Alexandria, who desired to prove the excellence of Judaism to educated heathen by showing the contrast between Judaism and heathenism, quoted to this end the social laws of the Bible in his writings to the Greeks. "Here you have," he tells them, "the fundamental ideas of Judaism. What can you, from the proud eminence of your culture, set up in comparison with it?" Philo was certainly the true son of his age, and acted in harmony with the opinion of his readers when he named his work "On the Love of One's Neighbor." Had he entitled his work "On Justice," his Pagan readers would not have understood him. They did not know that justice can mean something higher—a truth greater than that in their own law books. Philo was, therefore, obliged, if he wished to prove the superiority of the Jewish law, to praise its love of man. At the same time he desired to refute the favorite accusation against the Jews that they hated their fellowmen.

But few of the great social reformers, however, were conscious of treading in the footsteps of the Jewish pioneers. It was reserved for one of the most modern and far-seeing political economists, Henry George, the author of "Progress and Poverty," to show the influence of ancient Judaism on the social education of humanity and to recognize in Moses a hero whom the world must hail as a deliverer. It is inspiring yet humiliating that Henry George, who was not a member of our faith, should see more clearly than any other the greatness of the social law in ancient Judaism, and that he should cite it as an example to be copied even in the present day. Many Jews who work unceasingly in all social tasks and thereby feel themselves to be essentially modern perhaps for this very reason, refrain from studying the past of their own people. These same Jews are filled with surprise when they learn in a lecture or read in a pamphlet, or as probably happens very seldom when they hear in a sermon that the archives of Judaism have a deep significance for their own times, and not merely for divine worship, or archaeological research.

What, then, briefly stated, was the message of Henry George, which is today drawing under its banner such ardent and growing bands of men of every faith and race throughout the civilized world? The simple proposition that the earth, like the air, sun and water, is the gift of God

to all men present and to be, to which each has an equal right, for his sustenance, use and enjoyment. How do we know that each has this equal right? Because without the use of the earth no human being could exist, and as it is impossible to think otherwise than that each has an equal right to existence, it follows that each has an equal right to the use of the earth. Therefore, the granting of ownership of land to any individual is an unjustifiable breach of the moral law. Similarly, deductions by way of tax or otherwise from the result of man's labor are likewise an infraction of the moral right of the laborer to the product of his labor. In other words, the land is held "in usufruct" by the community, and in trust for the generations of men born and unborn. Wealth in every case results from the application of man's labor to land, and belongs inviolably to the individual who created it. Man did not create the earth—God created it; therefore no man-made law can justly make it man's. What a man produces belongs wholly to him; *his labour is his title deed*. Is it, then, necessary that each should have an equal portion of land in order that the rights of all may be secured? Not at all. That end may be accomplished by taking the value of land which arises from the existence of organized society, and which crystallizes itself in the form of rent, for communal purposes. After this war men in every country will be prepared for bold action in the reforming of their respective laws. Here is the opportunity to re-echo the principles laid down by our fathers and sustained in the economic proposals of Henry George. In this work, he assured them, they would be following the noble example of other Jews, who not only worked for these principles, but died for them, Max Hirsch and Joseph Fels, who, after long years of labor, bore final testimony with their lives. In this they followed their leader, who said:

"The truth I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured. But it will find friends—those who will toil for it; suffer for it; if need be, die for it. This is the power of truth."—From an Address by L. P. Jacobs, at Toynbee Hall, London.

## War Taxation—Will Land Values be Taxed Next?

DURING our various discussions of National problems at this Congress, no reference was made to bills which have been introduced in both the Senate and the House for a Federal Tax on idle land as a means of raising a portion of the war revenue. Thus far these bills have not made any progress, but since the plan has been under consideration by some of our law makers, it is proper, in my opinion, that the subject shall be discussed by us at this Conference.

Senator J. Hamilton Lewis, of Illinois, has offered an amendment to the War Revenue Bill to levy a Federal tax of one per cent. on all the land in the country, and an extra one per cent. on all land that is idle. I am not holding any brief for Senator Lewis's amendment, but I see consider-