

Land and Freedom

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Comment and Reflection

WORDS loosely used cause a lot of misunderstanding in the world. To be sure of our words, which are the symbols of thought, is the first essential of coherent reasoning. Take the word "socialist." It must be a curious combination of economic beliefs that makes bed-fellows of Al Smith, LaGuardia and Norman Thomas, for all have been called socialists. Take again the word "bolshevist." Does it mean the advocate of a political system, a form of government, or a kind of collective ownership? Or does bolshevism mean certain political or economic opinions to which we are opposed? Or does it mean merely a desire to change the existing order, or that the people have the right to change even by revolution if they choose such order when they make up their minds to do so, which would make Thomas Jefferson a first class bolshevist.

HERE again is the word "anarchist." And of this we are asked to believe that Herr Most—a generation ago the *enfant terrible* of the comfortable and self-satisfied—and the non-resistant Tolstoy, are members. All those representing the intermediate stages are also anarchists—and therefore dangerous to society as now constituted. It is convenient to group them together under one term. It simplifies the problem and makes unnecessary any troublesome thinking about the matter. The upholders of things as they are like to consider all proponents of change under some comprehensive term—it supplies a ready reckoner in place of more careful enumeration of numbers of group beliefs.

THERE is one advantage in this habit. Words are no longer descriptive of anything but become epithets or terms of abuse. Socialist, anarchist, bolshevist, have come to mean nothing any longer, and so the average man is utterly ignorant of anything the names imply. He has shut off every avenue of information by a wall of epithets. He has deprived himself of any knowledge of these schools of economic and political thought by thinking he hates what he does not understand.

A SHORT time ago a series of articles appeared in the *Forum* of this city on the question, "What is Civilization?" These articles have recently appeared in book

form. Hendrick William Van Loon tells us that civilization is a question of the "inner spirit"—a half truth only. Mr. Van Loon says, "It seems to me that the highest civilization is that form of society in which the greatest number show the greatest amount of consideration for the physical and spiritual happiness of the largest number of their neighbors"—a little limping this as a definition of civilization.

RAMSAY TREQUAIR says, "What we need is the possibility of normal poverty," and he naively adds, "it need not be carried too far." Elizabeth Robbins Pennell says, "We rub up against people whose want of manners adds enormously to our discomfort and robs us of the joy in life." Just so. Evidently civilization to this lady is a matter of politeness in subway trains, restaurants, or other public places. Desirable, no doubt, but why speak of it when the query is the very solemn one as to what constitutes civilization?

RALPH ADAMS CRAM declares that it is almost impossible to answer the query, "What is civilization," "because there are so many lines of approach." Maurice Maeterlinck says: "The ideal of material happiness whatever bliss it may lead to has never brought content to man." In their answers all these writers flounder. They discuss the query in terms of material achievement, religious belief, forms of art. But all seem at a loss to define it. None define it as liberty in equality. In one way or another all these writers exhibit a certain confusion. The question seems to be too much for them.

YET after all the term is capable of definition in a few words. None of these writers discuss the economic relations of man; his right to the use of the earth; the individual's inalienable sovereignty. Yet these are what constitute civilization, that men should enjoy an equality of economic and political rights, that they should be free of masters, that they should share in what they jointly produce—the value of land, the measure of product. If there is a "subtile alchemy" by which they are deprived of this, society is rent by an unnatural division of rich and poor. All the attendant evils follow—crime, degradation, class hatreds, poverty, immorality. And this is why civilizations have died and why our own cannot much longer endure.