

Christian Citizenship

IF one can judge by the Press reports the conference of delegates from various Christian churches on the subject of "Christian Citizenship," which was held in Sydney last Fall, was noteworthy, as so many similar conferences have been, for the complete lack of any proposals for dealing radically with the social problem. That there is a social problem was, of course, admitted, the Rev. A. H. Garnsey, M. A., who presided, declaring at the outset that "Civilization was like a man diseased," and that "poisons were working which would cause ruin and perhaps death," for which, however, "an anti-toxin was provided in the Christian faith."

The first point that strikes one in connection with "Christian Citizenship" is that under present conditions, there is and can be no such thing. Christianity considered in its broadest aspect resolves itself into a belief in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. The first necessarily implies that the great Father of mankind intended the earth for the sustenance, nourishment, and enjoyment of us all, and not for the exclusive use of a small number of His children, while the second implies that every child coming into the world has an equal right with every other to the natural resources of the earth, without access to which the children must starve. But man-made laws have long enabled the few to appropriate the earth and the natural resources contained therein, to the exclusion of the many, so that today we have the spectacle of 10 per cent. of the population holding all the best lands and thereby controlling the lives and destinies of the remaining 90 per cent.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

Mr. J. A. Bland told the conference—what everybody already knows—that most of the evils from which society is suffering might be dispersed if there were a more just distribution of wealth. But he omitted to tell us that the main cause of the unequal distribution of wealth is land monopoly, and that so long as land owners are permitted by law to appropriate the land value, or economic rent, which has been created solely by the community and therefore belongs by right to it and not to the landowners, just so long this unequal distribution of wealth must continue.

There will always be inequalities in the distribution of wealth, since some men will always produce more than others and will consequently be entitled to have more, but over and above this natural inequality is the far greater and unnatural inequality caused by the economic rent going into the pockets of private individuals instead of into those of the community as a whole.

A LAWYER'S FALLACY

Mr. A. B. Piddington, K. C., who was one of the prominent speakers at the conference, has frequently told us that the unequal distribution of wealth may be amended

by allotting wages according to the number of children, forgetting that wages depend not on the size of a man's family but on the value of his product. When the farmer sows his grain nature gives him a return little or big without asking him how many children he has to support. These natural laws, which the lawyers deride, have nevertheless a habit of over-riding and superseding the artificial laws made by men—wise or otherwise. Whatever man-made law may direct, the natural law provides that the product goes to the producer and unless its behests are carried out the penalty will have to be paid. Now the landowner, as such, does not produce, and therefore has no moral claim to any portion of the product, which should be distributed between the worker as wages, the capitalist (if capital is used) as interest, and the community as economic rent.

The trouble is that man has temporarily over-ridden this natural law for the enrichment of the few, and until natural law is allowed to re-assert itself the social problem will never be solved. In the meantime private individuals are called upon to pay for the expenses of government out of their private pockets by income taxes, Custom House taxes, stamp duties, and the thousand and one methods which the government uses to obtain the money which would otherwise have come from the economic rent.

"ARMCHAIR THEORISTS"

Rev. F. T. Walker, leader of the Methodist Men's Movement, said one of the most sensible things of which the press at any rate took note. "We have a glut," he told the conference, "of armchair theorists and manifestoes; what is wanted is to translate into practice the conclusions at which thinkers have arrived." Mr. Walker's pet slogan, by the way, is co-operation, a principle which is essential to the very existence of humanity, which permeates our lives from the cradle to the grave, and without which we could hardly live a single day, but co-operation will never solve the social problem unless it is the co-operation of the whole community for the abolition of land monopoly.

By far the most important and most radical of the conclusions arrived at by these "armchair theorists," the one indeed that has more common sense as well as biblical authority to support it than any other, is that every child that comes into the world has a citizen's right to an equal share in the earth, otherwise the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, in which both Christians and non-Christians believe, would be a farce.

The denial of this right is the fundamental wrong, which is at the root of all other wrongs, and which is the main cause of unemployment and poverty, since the first result of land monopoly is to prevent access to the source of all wealth, and till labor does get access to land, unemployment and poverty, the social problem and social discontent, will always be with us. This is the conclusion to which all "armchair theorists" and thinkers who go to the

root of the problem necessarily arrive. It is so self-evident that it would be waste of time and space to labor it any further. The only question, as Mr. Walker very rightly tells us, is how to translate this principle into practical terms.

THE ONLY SCIENTIFIC WAY.

The difficulty is seemingly so great that it was long regarded as insuperable, but it is insuperable no longer. It is now generally recognized that, while the land itself cannot be cut up and divided so that every child coming into the world shall have an equal share, the site value attaching to land can be so divided, and in N. S. W. and in Queensland at any rate a beginning has been made in the municipal sphere. That is to say, all landowners in Local Government areas in those two States have to hand over to the municipal authorities a certain proportional share of the land value, from which source alone all municipal expenditures are met. The reform has been in operation for a sufficient number of years to enable us to judge, and public opinion is practically unanimous as to the justice and manifold advantages of the method as compared with the penalising of industry and enterprise under the old system.

Extend this reform from the municipal to State and Federal spheres, abolishing all the exemptions and graduations by which the present method of levying the Federal land tax is marred, do away at the same time with the Customs House and income taxation which harasses industry and enterprises and makes living so dear, and you would go far to solve the social problem and to make Christian citizenship a fact of vital significance instead of an unmeaning phrase.

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

PERCY R. MEGGY.

From a Popular Novelist

“IN the early days he had homesteaded and sought enough land to make him rich. Now he had only to rent it out to good farmers who liked to work—he didn’t and of this he made no secret.”

“He knew that his father was sometimes called a ‘land-hog’ by the country people, and he himself had begun to feel that it was not right that they should own so much land—to farm, or to rent, or to leave idle as they chose. It was strange that in all the centuries the world had been going, the question of property had not been better adjusted. The people who had it were slaves to it and the people who did not have it were slaves to them.”

—ONE OF OURS, BY WILLA CATHER.

BOOK reviewer roasts Carolyn Wells’ latest detective story because she capitalizes the words “real estate.” But that’s the correct thing in the best circles.

W. J. Wallace Appeals to Friends of the Cause

WHEN the Commonwealth Land Party adopted their platform they certainly intended to make a candid presentation of their beliefs. Some will say that they were more candid than wise in thus taking the public fully into their confidence and running the risk of losing the votes of those who do not desire more than a partial application of our principles.

But the appeal of the party is more especially intended for the great mass of the people, who now have only a vague idea of its purpose, as, until the present campaign, its principles have been disguised under the name “Single Tax.”

This unintentional concealment has not attracted any recruits from the financial world. They realize the peril to their interests involved in our ideas and are, now and forever, unalterably opposed to them.

It is with regret we see that legitimate business enterprises, usefully engaged in the production and distribution of labor products, do not appear to recognize that they should have a position in public respect much superior to interests that merely appropriate to themselves the land that God created and the value of land that is made by the community.

We must consider, however, that useful business, not supported by a monopoly of nature, is essentially competitive and its owners are more dependent on the good will of their customers and others than the owners of city lots, mines, ranches, oil deposits or water power sites. Although useful they are subservient; and a subservient class finds it prudent to conform to the opinions of those who have the power to injure them.

Many useful businesses are partially supported by the ownership of land, and this gives their owners quite an advantage in the present struggle for success. How natural to approve of it without further thought! Yet it intensifies the struggle of all those who are not supported by the advantage and strongly tends to prevent their success.

Social rank, public position, easy tolerance of things as they are, all retard an acceptance of our beliefs.

It is difficult to awake a proper appreciation of their own standing among those who are supporting human society by their enterprise and work. They defer to the loafers and drones, and, seeing their easy life, their eminence and power, merely desire to become one of them.

From the top down financial interests are opposed to us. Big business, which craves any monopoly that will increase its control, is opposed to us. Small business, so dependent on patronage and good will, and with its mind possessed with the thought of obtaining security through privilege, is not, as yet, our friend.